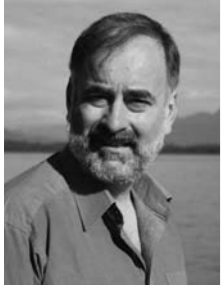


# Dualchas coitcheann Common heritage



Two birds traditionally linked with Scotland carry English names that come from Gaelic. Ruairidh MacIlleathain explains the origins of *ptarmigan* and *capercaillie*



## Two 'Gaelic' birds of Scotland

The silent 'p' in 'ptarmigan' is an odd way to start the word. It was apparently added by dictionary makers, despite the word's clear origin in the Gaelic *tàrmachan*, rather than any Ancient Greek root. In old Scottish manuscripts in Scots or English, the initial letter of the word is 't' not 'p'. The inspiration for *tàrmachan* (*tormachan* in the Gairloch dialect) is the word *tarm* or *torm*, which means a 'murmur' – a good description of the call made by this mountain-dwelling bird, as hillwalkers can confirm.

Its relative, the 'capercaillie', also owes its English name to the Gaelic language. It is *capall-coille* – 'the horse of the forest' – as Bishop Leslie indicated some four centuries ago. The name comes from the call of the cock

bird on the ancestral 'lek' or breeding ground – it's thought to resemble the noise made by a horse's hooves when moving at pace.

The words 'ptarmigan' and 'capercaillie' mean little without knowing their origins. But *tàrmachan* and *capall-coille* are names with meaning and significance. They offer a hint of the richness to be found in the links between the Gaelic language and Scotland's environment.

If you'd like to learn more about Gaelic names for animals, trees and plants, check out our new online database called *Faclan Nàdair*, or 'Words of Nature'. The database is for both Gaelic speakers and non-speakers and you can find it at [www.snh.org.uk/gaelic/dictionary](http://www.snh.org.uk/gaelic/dictionary)

1, 2

The sounds they make give us their names: the capercaillie (1) and the ptarmigan (2) are two beautiful and valuable bird species that carry English names derived from the Gaelic interpretation of their calls.

## Dà eun 'Ghàidhlig' na h-Alba

Tha aon rud cinnteach mun fhacal *tàrmachan*, às an d' fhuair eadh 'ptarmigan' ann am Beurla – cha robh an litir 'p' ceangailte ris a-riamh ann an Gàidhlig! Cha mhò a nochd am 'p' ann an seann làmh-sgrìobhainnean Beurla ann an Alba. Mar eisimpleir, sgrìobh an Rìgh, Seumas VI, gu Iarla Thulaich Bhàrdainn, ag iarraidh air 'termigantis' a chur thuige (airson an truinnseir). Tha e coltach gun deach am 'p' neo-fhuaimnichte a chur ri toiseach an fhacail le muinntir Oxford nuair a bhathar a' cur faclair Beurla ri chèile (samhail 'pterodactyl'). Ann an sgìre Gheàrrloch, 's e *tormachan* a chanar ris an eun-mhonaidh seo agus tha smuain ann gur e *torm* (no *torman*) am facal as fheàrr a nì tuairisgeul air gairm an eòin. A bharrachd air sin, 's e *tarm* seann riochd air *torm*. 'S ann às an fhuaim a dh'èirich ainm an eòin, a rèir choltais.

'S e an *tàrmachan* eun oifigeil stàite Alasga agus 's iomadh duine a mhair beò tron gheamhradh an sin le bhith ag ithe thàrmachan. Air sàilleabh sin,

bhathar a' dol a chur 'Ptarmigan' mar ainm air baile beag mèinnearach ann an taobh sear na stàite o chionn mu cheud bliadhna. Ge-tà, cha b' urrainn do na daoine aontachadh air litreachadh an ainm (air sàilleabh a' 'p') agus chuir iad 'Chicken' mar ainm air a' bhaile na àite!

Tha an *capall-coille* càirdeach don *tàrmachan* ach tha e a' fuireach sna coilltean ghiuthais seach sa mhonadh – mar a bhiodh dùil bho ainm ann an Gàidhlig. O chionn ceithir cheud bliadhna, sgrìobh an t-Easbaig Leslie gun robh a' Bheurla *capercaillie* a' tighinn bhon Ghàidhlig, a' ciallachadh 'horse of the forest'. Thathar a' dèanamh dheth gur e as coireach ri ainm gairm a' choilich aig àm na dàra. Tha e coltach ris an fhuaim a tha casan eich a' dèanamh, a' falbh aig astar. Tha an *capall-coille* agus an *tàrmachan* priseil do mhuinntir na h-Alba ann an iomadh dòigh. Am measg sin, tha gun do dh'èirich na h-ainmean Beurla aca bho ar cànan fhèin.

1, 2

Tha an gairmean a' toirt dhuinn an ainmean: 's e dà eun bhrèagha luachmhor a th' anns a' chapall-coille (1) agus an *tàrmachan* (2), ainmean a dh'èirich às na gairmean a tha iad a' dèanamh.

