

National Bird for Scotland

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Of Gaelic provenance with a classical prosthesis
going back to the Jurassic *Sinornithosaurus*,
I'm going for *Lagopus mutus*, the ptarmigan,

endemic to Highland Region,
surviving on shoots and sprouts and seed
in scrapes in the forest glens in January
and survival woods in cryptic plumage,

low-growing, and, after the last issue
of snow and ice melt, summering between
the mottled grey and buff-brown on rugged outlooks
below the tree line with support sparse

and visible only rarely
and its guttural, slightly alien vocalisation
among the swales and scree
in the higher elevations of Coir' an Uaigneis.

Nitromorsing

Kathleen a whole week dead,
I'm back in her house with my mother,
laying it out for sale
in another week's time—

Nitromorsing the tables at first,
clearing the shelves of their
contents, packing them all
into old boxes, buried

under all the dust;
Mother working every hour God sent;
the paint coming off the wall;
the only sound the mixer tap

in the kitchen still
dripping; her Hoover bag full
to overflowing; the flex under our feet,
for all our care, still tripping us up.

The Deserted Village, Achill

To the north of the clachan, malachite,
azurite, rare
deposits of tourmaline;

a golden eagle above
a cairn on the north-west face
of Slievemore, scarred by a corrie;

Sweeney's cave;

a nunatak above the Midlandian ice;

Lennon's drowned drumlins, the submerged coastline
in the glacial sea,
eroded beaches, vanished continent of Tir Thingome.

On cuttings in blanket bog and where the road
widens, *Gunnera tinctoria* spreads fast,
seeds carried far from the parent plant
(one thinks of Kirkintilloch or Cleveland).

On indifferent soil over the brae,
Chongia, Dooagh, "largest village in Europe" once,
by the machair, Keel and Sruhillsbeg Lough, damned
by shingle and sand,

stunted shrubs, *Ericaulon*, *Erica mediterranea*,
relict flora
from Lusitania.

The Salmon Carol Ann Duffy, Cliffs of Moher

The Gourami Sujata Bhatt, Kazimierz Dolny
The Wahoo Kamala Das, Ijebu-ode
The Pirarucu Lavinia Greenlaw, Kpiri Mposhi
The Curimbata Vona Groarke, Ste Marie de la Madeleine
The Vieja Carole Satyamurti, Maksimkin Yar
The Bichir Patience Agbabi, Dayr az Zawr
The Arvana OluYomi Majekodunmi, General Paz
The Zander Debjani Chatterjee, Ivano-Frankovsk
The Jaraqui Zsuzsa Rakovszky, Árhús Amtskommune
The Mako a-dZiko Simba, White City
The Tarpon Moniza Alvi, Quombatook
The Opah Suniti Namjoshi, Kabambare
The Nile Mouthbrooder Sudeep Sen, Harz
The Xiphophorus helleri Darvwall Mahapatra, Zigui

The King

Beside me in the front seat
only the other day,
Seumas pointed out
his grandfather—“What was his name again, Dad?”
“Tom” “Oh yes, Tom”—died on the toilet
in the same way as Elvis Presley.

And although, unlike The King,
the old boy wasn't actually eating
a hamburger—ever the traditionalist!—
at the time, we wondered
if his final words might not have been:
Thakavermuchlaiesngnlmn!