

DOI 10.31250/2618-8600-2022-1(15)-28-55

UDK 641.55:397.4(512.212)

**D. Brandišauskas**

---

Vilnius University

Vilnius, Lithuania

ORCID: 0000-0002-3288-1012

Email: d.brandisauskas@gmail.com

---

## **Good to Eat and Good to Dream About: What Do Nomadic Evenki Eat in Taiga?**

**ABSTRACT.** This article is an ethnographic essay that aims to describe the leading dietary practices of contemporary nomadic Evenki living in the taiga of Zabaikal'e. I show how their lives as hunters and reindeer herders also sustain the traditional methods of food harvesting, processing, preservations, and consumption. Further, I show how the Evenki diet heavily relies on human interactions with animals viewed as sentient persons. Evenki ideas of luck, personhood, sharing, and exchange figure prominently in those animal-human interactions. As a consequence of Evenki perceptions and relations with animals, I argue that taiga food is vital as Evenki cultural form of representation and links Evenki communities with a living environment. This subsistence economy conditions their wellbeing, healing, and enjoyment. In sum, eating and sharing taiga food is shown to be an integral part of being Evenki. The article is based on the long-term field research I conducted among a few communities of Evenki reindeer herders and hunters based in the Zabaikal Region and Buriatia in 2004-2012.

**KEY WORDS:** Evenki, reindeer herders and hunters, diet, taiga food, Zabaikal region, Buriatia

**FOR CITATION:** Brandišauskas D.  
Good to Eat and Good to Dream About:  
What Do Nomadic Evenki Eat in Taiga?  
*Etnografija*. 2022. 1 (15): 28–55. (In Eng.). doi  
10.31250/2618-8600-2022-1(15)-28-55

## Брандишаускас Д.

---

Вильнюсский Университет

Вильнюс, Литва

ORCID: 0000-0002-3288-1012

E-mail: d.brandisaukas@gmail.com

---

### Хорошо для еды и для снов: что едят кочевые эвенки в тайге?

АННОТАЦИЯ. Данная статья представляет собой этнографический очерк, цель которого — описать основные пищевые практики современных кочевых эвенков, живущих в тайге Забайкалья. Я показываю, как их жизнь в качестве охотников и оленеводов поддерживает традиционные методы сбора, обработки, сохранения и потребления пищи. В работе показано, что рацион эвенков в значительной степени зависит от взаимодействия человека с животными, рассматриваемыми как разумные личности. Эвенкийские идеи удачи, индивидуальности, обмена и совместного проживания занимают важное место во взаимодействии животных и человека. Как следствие эвенкийских представлений и отношений с животными, я утверждаю, что таежная пища важна не только как культурная форма репрезентации эвенков, но и как связь эвенкийских общин с окружающей средой. Эта натуральная экономика обуславливает их благополучие, лечебные практики и представления об удовольствии. Таким образом, употребление и совместное использование таежной пищи является неотъемлемой частью жизни эвенков. Статья основана на результатах моего долгосрочного полевого исследования, которое я проводил среди нескольких общин эвенкийских оленеводов и охотников, проживающих в Забайкальском крае и Бурятии в 2004-2012 годах.

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА: Эвенки, оленеводы и охотники, пища, таежные блюда, Забайкальский Край, Бурятия

ДЛЯ ЦИТИРОВАНИЯ: Brandišauskas D.

Good to Eat and Good to Dream About:

What Do Nomadic Evenki Eat in Taiga?

*Etnografija*. 2022. 1 (15): 28–55. (In Eng.). doi

10.31250/2618-8600-2022-1(15)-28-55

## INTRODUCTION

Most indigenous Evenki families based in East Siberia and the Far East cannot imagine their wellbeing without a proper diet consisting of different living beings harvested in the taiga. In this view, the taiga is a nurturing home that generously provides humans with all the life-sustaining properties they need. For most Evenki communities, the different game animals inhabiting the taiga are the most important source of nutrition. They are viewed as crucial sources for sustaining humans' energies, mobility, health, and physical wellbeing. Taiga food also provides great pleasure as a delicacy and is an essential attribute for having a sense of being an Evenki. Evenki believe that eating a taiga harvest provides them with the best energy and health sources to perform their everyday duties, especially those that explicitly involve withstanding environmental challenges. Indigenous food sources are also rich in nutrients that facilitate one's recovery from illnesses and can also cure disease. They say that no relative can live without wild animal meat. Therefore, Evenki equate eating game animals with being Evenki. The frequency of eating game animal meat signifies the prosperity of the taiga as contemporary Evenki frequently stress that the taiga can barely feed Evenki over the last decade. Thus, eating game animals gives a sense of security that the taiga can continue to provide food for them. Harvested ungulates such as moose, deer, wild reindeer also provide hunters, herders, and members of their extended families a substantial amount of nutrition for long periods. Furthermore, harvested animals provide hides, sinews, hooves, some bones, and other animal parts, which are used in the production of different clothing, footwear, sleepwear, and tools (see Brandišauskas 2011, 2017b).

Eating hunted animal flesh also involves nuanced ways of knowing about animals, the anatomy of their bodies, and processes that affect living environments. It also defines one's skills, and the success one generates to sustain hunting luck. Hence, the skinning and fleshing of animals, the consumption of different body parts of the animal, and showing respect toward the remains of the animal are all part of the intimate relationship Evenki feel with hunted animals. By fleshing and eating animals, humans became familiar with the biographies of animals and their patterns of subsistence, linking them with specific environmental contexts. The annual seasonal cycle comes with temperature fluctuations, precipitations, river changes, weather conditions, forest fires, and deforestation. These variables also affect the body shapes of animals and, consequently, the diet of hunters and herders (see also Lavrillier and Gabyshev 2017). Therefore, eating animals also means learning about their individuality, embodiment, fat levels, tastes, and sizes. It also interrelates humans, animals, and environments into intimate networks of exchange and interdependency. Subsistence on wild animals also relies on the multi-modal reciprocal partnerships one must hold with individual animals, masters-spirits, and landscapes (see Brandišauskas 2017a).

In my previous publications, I demonstrated how the Evenki of Zabaikal'e skinned and fleshed hunted animals (Brandišauskas 2006) and how different animal hides were processed to produce valuable gear, especially clothing and footwear (see Brandišauskas 2017b). I also showed how they used various taiga goods and animal parts for medicinal purposes (Brandišauskas 2010). I elaborated how the fleshing and skinning of animals rely on personal skills, which include not just empirical knowledge of animals' movements and habits but also how cosmological reasons shape this knowledge and its implementation (see Brandišauskas 2017a). In this article, I hope to review how taiga Evenki value the harvest as a crucial source of nutrition that one needs for life when living in remote villages or nomadic taiga camps. I will also show how nomadic lifestyles shape how different animal parts are processed and made available as a source of diet during the whole annual cycle of seasons.

This article is based on the long-term field research I conducted among a few communities of Evenki reindeer herders and hunters based in the Zabaikal Region and Buriatia in 2004–2012. I use vernacular Evenki terminology describing different dishes, animals, and body parts that I recorded mainly in the Tungokochen district (Zabaikal Region). During my fieldwork, I was involved personally in all aspects of food processing and helped to hunt, butcher, transport, process food as well as to dispose of animal parts. My food ration was the same as that of the hunters and herder for the whole time of my collaboration with indigenous Evenki. Indeed, while some terminologies vary, nevertheless similar dishes, techniques of preservations, and butchering or preferences can still be found among many nomadic communities scattered in large geographical areas that lived in the past or still inhabit taiga in the present (see Popov 1926).

It is important to note that today Evenki reindeer herders based in taiga rarely eat their domestic reindeer with whom they create intimate interpersonal relationships as transport animals and lifestyle partners that ensure traditional lifeways, land use, and cultural capital for the whole community. Only in rare cases wounded or old domestic reindeer can be killed and consumed; therefore, some Evenki would even say that it is a sin (Ev. *odio*) to slaughter domestic reindeer without having a serious reason. Nikolai Aruneev would say that such reindeer propose themselves for their slaughter. At the same time, reindeer herders say that reindeer meat has an extraordinary quality that can empower humans and cure many diseases.

Thereby, wild reindeer, moose, elk, and other smaller ungulates together with wild birds are the most welcomed source of diet for all Evenki communities. The importance of fish in the everyday diet varies significantly among different Evenki communities according to the environmental characteristics of the area they inhabit and, of course, seasonal variations. Many Evenki communities that live at higher altitudes harvest fish only occasionally. Only those Evenki who live near larger rivers hold fish as an important part of their diet.

Nevertheless, fish is an essential source of the diet, mainly for villagers, while any nomadic Evenki hunters and herders would say that fish is only a snack. Some Evenki of Tungokochen elders do not eat fish at all. As reindeer herder elder Olga Zhumaneeva told me, her grandmother used to teach her not to eat fish since it is *sirekte* (warm). Mushrooms (Ev. *dainaktal*, R. *griby*) are considered the main food of reindeer, and Evenki herders do not eat it almost at all.

For the Evenki of Zabaikal'e, large game animals are the most desired source of food. This category would firstly include moose (Ev. *boiun*, R. *sokhatyi*), elk (Ev. *bugun*, R. *iziubr'*), wild reindeer (Ev. *mongotu*, R. *sokzhoi*), roe deer (Ev. *givchan*, R. *koza*), boar (Ev. *aidan*, R. *kaban*) and rabbits (Ev. *tuksaki*, R. *zaiats*). An occasional and seasonal role in the diet is played by bear (Ev. *amikan*, R. *medved'*), musk deer (Ev. *mekcha*, R. *kabarga*), lynx (Ev. *sekalan*, R. *rys'*) and squirrels (Ev. *uluki*, R. *belka*). However, the carcass of a bear or boar is considered a good kill, though there are some restrictions on the consumption of these animals that are both ritual and ecological.

Evenki occasionally hunt forest birds, especially if they are in an opportunistic situation, such as while walking on foot or riding reindeer in the taiga and spotting the bird nearby. Women and children are more actively involved in birds hunting, while some Evenki women are still active and successful hunters of game animals. The birds are very welcomed as a variation of one's proper diet, especially in the spring when hunting ungulates becomes challenging due to the weather conditions. Birds migrate in spring, and therefore many of them can easily be shot at special resting and feeding sites and mating sites. The Evenki of Zabaikal'ia hunt partridge (Ev. *oribko*, R. *riabchik*), capercaillie (Ev. *oroki* male and *urkitian* female, R. *glukhar'*), and grouse (Ev. *burbuki*, R. *kosach'*). Evenki, who made camps near a larger river or lake also hunt water birds such as swan (Ev. *bagdama*, R. *lebed*), duck diver (Ev. *urivki*, R. *nyrok*), widgeon (Ev. *kongmandy*, R. *chornogolova*), common teal (Ev. *llikan*, R. *chirok*), duck (Ev. *chute*), goosander (Ev. *aldamachen*, R. *krakhal*), and goose (Ev. *niungna*, R. *gus*). In the spring, wild birds' eggs (Ev. *mukta*) are also opportunistically picked up.

The first berries appear by the middle of July. However, most berries are gathered in August and then preserved for the whole winter. Evenkis collect blueberry (Ev. *dikte*, R. *golubika*), (Ev. *uchiumukta*, R. *zhemolost*), strawberry (Ev. *tumpukta*, R. *zemlianika*), rowan (Ev. *nikte*, R. *riabina*), and gooseberry (Ev. *aiuli*, R. *makhovka*). Bilberry (Ev. *imikta*, R. *brusnika*) is a specific berry that is easily gathered by Evenki females and children in early September and up to the first frosts. Usually, bilberry is stored in birch bark bowls and kept on storage platforms (Ev. *delken*) for winter consumption. *Imikta* is mainly used for medical purposes as the berries are scalded with hot water as soon as one feels the first symptoms of cold weather. The berries are studied and can be found under a layer of snow. They are also frequently turned into a jam with the help of a dollop of sugar. Herders and hunters often eat frozen berries

during the winter while setting traps. Blueberries are probably the second most important berry gathered by Evenki and often consumed as jam during the winter season. Blueberries are harvested from the start of August up to November. Their popularity is the reason that they can be found in large quantities in the taiga, and they are also easy to gather and put into containers. Berries also have a high monetary value and are often sold to traders. Blueberries can be gathered even in spring with a special bowl called *bitok* (in Russian) or *guiavun* in Evenki.). The bowl is made from birch skin and is specifically designed to harvest blueberries. Evenki produce such bowls from spring birch skin that is boiled, oiled, or heated next to the fire at the time of production.

#### FAST FOOD IN THE TAIGA: TEA, SUGAR, AND FLOWER

All Evenki talk about the wild animal dishes with much respect and desire. As one Evenki elder stated: “I do respect proper eating (R. *uvazhau khorosho pokushat*’).” Such nutrition is not only providing happiness and brings pleasure, but first, it is seen as a source of strength and physical fitness. Such nutrition provides fats, minerals, and vitamins having all the potencies to cure people and make them healthy in an environment where temperatures vary significantly, while hunters and herders can make daily walks up to 30 km. However, when hunted animal carcasses are absent, hunters and herders eat products brought high in carbohydrates, including a variety of pasta as well as more costly grits such as buckwheat or rice. Some vegetables can also be brought from villages during the summer period of the year, but vegetables do not last long in the taiga. Pasta or grits can be eaten with canned jelly meat, which, due to its poor quality, has little nutritional value and is still quite an expensive grocery for most herders and hunters. Thereby, tea, sugar, and wheat flour have been the main groceries imported from the villages to remote taiga areas for more than two hundred years.

Every reindeer herders’ camp has an oven made from flat stones (Ev. *delema*). The stone stove is mostly used in warm periods of the year to bake yeast bread called *kiltera*. The dough is mixed and kneaded, and left in a warm place until it rises. It is churned three times and then baked. Evenki set an intense fire inside the stove cavity to heat the stones. After the wood is burned, all the coals are scraped out. The dough is placed in metal baking pans and pushed inside the hot stove for 40–60 minutes. This type of bread is also made in villages in brick-built stoves. Some Baunt Evenki reindeer herders and hunters used to bake bread on hot sand in the summer. For this method, a fire is lit on the sand. After that, bread tins are buried in the hot sand. In wintertime or during hunting trips, nomadic Evenki make a round flatbread called *uvon*. This bannock is made from flour, water or milk, soda, oil, sugar, salt. It is fried with a little oil in the pan until it develops a dark yellow color. The *uvon* is finished by setting it up right next to the fire. The flour itself can be also

be added to a soup. Flour can also be fried on a pan and then added to tea (dish-*diatavaravur*). Sometimes, reindeer herders use flour to make meat dumplings (R. *pel'meni*) and rissoles (R. *pirozhki*). It is usually made when fresh meat is delivered to the camp. The liver, lungs, kidneys are usually used as fillings for rissoles.

For any nomadic Evenki, black tea is the most common dish in their daily life. It is not a rare case when for days or weeks, the main dish of the hunter and herders is black tea sweetened with sugar that is consumed with a piece of bread and sometimes sweets. Indeed, some village-based hunters with whom I spent weeks hunting were reluctant to take any groceries to the taiga, but they always had black tea with a large bag of sugar and some bread. Hence, the hunter Aleksei Aruneev often repeated while hunting that “it is not a big problem when food is running low in the camp, but it is impossible to continue hunting and herding without tea.” While sugar is one of the most important ingredients in the tea, the quality of contemporary black tea is also often discussed, referring to the smell and strength of black Ceylon tea that was available in Soviet times. Today, there are also candies and chocolate sweets added to the tea in the taiga camps. A variety of bread is an additional snack with tea. These are imported frozen bread cooked in the village, self-made flower bread fried on oil in the tent, or the freshly baked bread in a stone oven made in taiga camps.

Tea is also a source of warmth and energy; therefore, bringing water to a boil and keeping it hot is the main duty of anybody who stays in the tent or camp, while others leave camp for hunting or searching for domestic reindeer. Such hot water should also be ready for a moment when hunters and herders return after long routes on foot. Olga Zhumaneeva used to boil tea when we arrived at a new place without even resting after a long walk. Once, she prepared a fire for making tea after a long trip and said: “It is our custom to boil tea first (R. *u nas takoi obychai*)”. Indeed, tea drinking also comes with a unique behavioral code among nomadic Evenki. As soon as a hunter or herder returns from his trip, he always drinks tea in silence. Nobody must disturb him. Only after he has finished his tea, does he start telling what he has seen or done.

There can also be some milk or powdered soya milk added to the sweetened tea. In villages, tea is always drunk with milk and sugar. However, in camps, white tea is still a luxury. Thereby, milk substitute soya powder is one of the valuable groceries one can take when visiting reindeer herders. Some village-based hunters are so used to drinking tea with milk that they carry sufficient frozen milk to their winter cabins to last for a whole hunting season. In summer and partly autumn, reindeer milk is added to the tea. Only three teaspoons are needed to make 1.5 liters of tea white and give it the special taste Evenki desire. However, in the villages, when I was invited to drink tea (R. *chaevat'*) it usually meant that some more substantial meals would be served with the tea. At least some bread, berry jam, cookies and candies can

be added to the tea, but also it is quite often when *chaevat'* (drinking tea) also means an invitation to eat a full course meal. Nadezhda Zhumaneeva from Tungokochen remembers being taught by her father to always serve hot tea for guests, even for short visits.

In the past, when the collective farm supplied groceries to reindeer herders, a diet of wild meat still was the central part of the diet for all hunters and herders. The Tungokochen reindeer herder Nikolai Aruneev imported many products (Ev. *osokol*, R. *produkty*) to the taiga from Chita city or Tungokochen village. Some products are brought in by heavy-duty vehicles in November, when the soil freezes and the rivers are covered with ice, or in April, when the rivers and soil are still frozen. Heavy vehicles are rented out to deliver groceries. All products were initially stored in a special wooden house called a *baza*. Later, the products were transported with pack reindeer to winter or summer camps and left in various wooden platforms called *labaz* (Ev. *gula*) or stored in specially made open platforms (Ev. *delken*). Food and products can be left covered with larch or birch bark and a canvas on these platforms. Products also can be stored for cold periods on the ground in specially made corrals (Ev. *kurekan*). Onion and garlic are usually stored frozen, while potatoes are peeled before freezing. It is important to note that many older Evenki do not eat potatoes at all, while younger Evenki usually bring potatoes just to eat from time to time. Bread is usually bought frozen from Chita city or Tungokochen village and stored for the winter.

The table below represents the amount of food imported from the village to taiga camp that is expected for 3–5 humans for a period of half a year. However, such an amount includes extra food for a much longer time in case of difficulties getting food in the spring.

*Table 1.*  
LIST OF GROCERIES BROUGHT FOR 3–5 PEOPLE  
TO NOMADIC REINDEER HERDERS CAMP

Products	Quantity	Expected period
Flour	1000 kg	6 months
Macaroni	120 kg	6 months
Sugar	150 kg	6 months
Salt	500 kg <sup>1</sup>	6 months
Rice	100 kg	6 months
Tea	120 packs (100 gr each)	6 months

<sup>1</sup> Extra salt is used to feed reindeer as well as make salted sites (Ev. *taloi*, R. *solianka*) that are used to attract hunted wild hoofed animals.



*End of Tab. 1*

Cooking Oil	48 bottles (1 liter each)	6 months
Butter	10–20 kg	6 months
Fat	10 kg	6 months
Candy	12 kg	6 months
Dry Soup	50 packs — 90 gr each	6 months
Dry Milk	10 kg	6 months
Spring wheat	50 kg	6 months
Onion	5 kg	6 months
Garlic	5 kg	6 months
Potatoes	50 kg	6 months
Soda	4 kg	12 months
Dry yeast	0,5 kg	12 months
Cabbage	10 kg	6 months
Borsch, Solianka	24 cans (500 gr each)	6 months
Spices	some	6 months
Ketchup, mustard	some	6 months

*Table 2.*

THIS TABLE REPRESENTS IMPORTED FOOD THAT  
IS TAKEN FOR DIFFERENT HUNTING TRIPS:

<b>Products for 3 persons — 1 week hunt</b>
Potatoes — 5–10kg
Bread — 20 (700gr each)
Sugar — 3kg
Noodle — 3kg
Rice — 2kg
Tea — 3packs (100gr each)
Salt — 1kg
Meat for the first two days

## TAIGA 'HAPPY MEAL': MEAT OF HARVESTED ANIMALS

If one is lucky to kill a large game animal in the taiga, this means a much happier period of life in the camp. People enjoy solid eating and praise, the feeling of fullness, and the taste of different parts of the animal; they might express happiness and satisfaction in several different ways. Similar to Samokhin's (1927) observation of the Evenki of Bodaibo, hunters and herders can eat a lot after successful hunting. Often when they have meat, they have also had long periods with the absence of meat in their diet. During the consumption of a recent kill, small bits of animal parts are put into the fire to thank the taiga masters and to share meat with spirits. This is a time when stories are shared freely. Sharing food with neighbors also brings happiness and a sense of being a full-fledged hunter. Indeed, taiga ethics rely heavily on the Evenki notion of *nimat*: the feeling of sharing the meat of hunted animals with family, neighbors, friends, and those who lack food. Hence, it is bad luck to hoard meat and kill animals in an extensive manner (see Brandišauskas 2017a). Indeed, the respect shown during the consumption of animal parts or after the food consumption is a usual protocol followed by people living and subsisting in the taiga. Fatty meat is always the most praised and enjoyed, as people would point out that such food provides them with an essential inflow of energy. If the animal is lean, the hunters can explain, usually pointing to environmental changes or the influx of wolves to the area. However, the initial period of good eating and feasting are always marked by the consumption of the heart, liver, kidneys, intestines filled with blood, tongue, and bone marrow, all of which provide enjoyment as well as a palpable feeling of energy that comes with the consumption of these animal parts. Often liver and kidney can be little cooked or eaten raw.

Different parts of animals can be described as having the power to cure various diseases and disabilities. Kidneys and the liver of roe deer, musk deer, and wild reindeer are eaten raw. It is said by villagers that the raw liver has lots of vitamins and helps to improve vision. Usually, raw kidneys and liver are fed to children. The liver of moose and elk are also cooked by placing them on a stick next to the fire instead of over the fire. Especially valued are the kidneys of male elks at the time of mating in autumn since hunters say that the kidneys at this time are fat, large, and nutritious. Therefore, the raw liver is often brought to the village or camp and given to ill people and children.

Many elders would stress that the head of ungulates is rich in fats, and it is a very delicious part of the animal, and therefore one should eat it first. The Tungokochen elder Gennadii Kirilov remembers that when extended families used to migrate in the area, the head of a game animal would be given to older people to eat. Pavel Naikanchin from Rossoshino village told me that the brains are the most enjoyable part of the head and eaten first. Nikolai Dimitrov, from Bugunda village, also said that such a habit of eating the head is closely



Fig. 1. Scorching a delicacy- “moose lips”. Photo by D. Brandišauskas, 2005.

related to the belief that a spirit (Ev. *amin*, R. *dusha*) of the animal exists in the animals' head. In this context, elders say that leaving the head of a killed animal in taiga would bring bad luck, and they would criticize younger hunters for doing this. In some cases, animal remains, such as intestines, can be fed to dogs right after the skinning. Other parts that are not eaten or are not ritually "dangerous" can be gathered and put into a river or stored on a specially made open platform (R. *labaz*, Ev. *delken*). While the head is preferably eaten first, animal bones and hooves can often be boiled at the end of the consumption period and given to those who have pain in their joints.

All the food in the summertime is cooked over a fire in the particular cooking area of the camp called the *sounan* (kitchen). A tripod, also called *sounan*, can be used to hold the kettle (Ev. *kolokochan*). It can also be used as a *ole* (Ev. *togan*) supported by two forked sticks that are used to hold the kettle. In the wintertime, food is made on an iron stove inside a canvas tent. The simplest way to prepare meat or other animal parts is to boil them in water. Meat is usually boiled between 30–40 minutes, and such soup is called *silia*. Often some rice or noodles are added to it. Wild onion (Ev. *ongukta*) and garlic (Ev. *mangisun*) can also be added to the soup during warm periods of the year. Wild garlic and onion are harvested in July. They are cut, salted, and stored in glass pots over the colder periods. The fresh meat of a freshly killed animal is boiled, leaving it quite raw. Such a method for preparing meat is called *chukin*. Some potatoes can be added to such soups, but the semi-raw meat is also believed to provide all the necessary energy for the family of hunters and herders. The meal is usually made in the evening, as soon as somebody comes back from searching for reindeer or hunting. In the morning, the soup is warmed up, and the pot is usually empty. However, if there is enough meat and plenty of time, such soup can be produced twice a day in the morning and evening. When I asked why they did not grill meat, Aleksei Aruneev told me that there is no way to get a full stomach when eating meat cooked on coal. However, the heart, liver, and kidneys are usually cooked on a stick which is placed over the coals as soon as the hunter is back in camp from a successful hunt. It takes a short time to cook these parts, and they are often eaten semi-raw. This method of cooking on a stick is called *silavun* (R. *shahslyk*). Hunters will also eat roe deer meat cooked as *silavun*. Sometimes raw deer can be frozen and then eaten raw while dipping it into salt. Often bear fat is frozen and consumed similarly. There is also another way of cooking meat directly by putting it on coals or on an iron stove called a *bulatta*.

Most hunters value meat rich in fat, and it does not matter if it is moose or elk or wild reindeer (see also Shubin 2007: 34). It is believed that killing an animal with a lot of fat on a hunting trip is a fortunate and most appreciated event. A fat animal means the generosity of the taiga, and therefore such fat meat is shared with guests and older people. Aleksei Aruneev says that fatty meat prevents one from feeling hungry for a long time. It warms up a person



Fig. 2. Aleksei Aruneev enjoying raw liver near Talakan river. Photo by D. Brandišauskas, 2004.

from inside and gives lots of strength to walk in an uneven and wet environment searching for reindeer, tracking, and hunting. It takes many hours for hunters and herders of walking via humps (Ev. *chiokchioko*, R. *kochki*), stones (Ev. *dido*, R. *rossip* ') as well as snow (Ev. *imanda*) therefore, it is believed that only fat meat can support the ability to walk long distances.

*Tokomin* — is another well-known Evenki dish. It is always made during Evenki celebrations, such as Reindeer herders' day for indigenous people. *Tokomin* is produced from moose or deer meat, lungs, heart, and brains cut into tiny pieces and cooked with intestine fat taken from the large intestine, called *moman*. The chopped meat is cooked with bone marrow. *Moman* is considered one of the most valuable parts of an animal since it is full of fat. Evenki cut *moman* with special attention and hang it on the tree not to be eaten by dogs. *Moman* is not to eat alone but always added to a soup or used as fat for cooking in a pan. Animal hoofs are also gathered to cook a particular soup eaten after it gels.

Some hunters would joke that it is probably easier to say which animals cannot be eaten. Hunters say that they never eat sable (Ev. *niaka*), (Ev. *dzhantaki*), wolverine wolf (Ev. *bagdama*), fox (Ev. *sulaki*) and mice (Ev. *unokochon*). However, hunters would also point out that they tried to eat everything in their lives and would not mind eating those animals in case of food shortages. And indeed, I was surprised when I saw that young wolverine meat was once processed for food. Some hunters even eat ermine (Ev. *dzhentaki*), owl (Ev. *umil*), and other animals or birds usually considered inedible. Hunters say that wild boar is not consumable in mating season (December month) since it smells terrible. However, as soon as there is a meat shortage, wild boar can be consumed by mixing it with other meat and adding fat. Such minced meat cutlets are fried in a pan often with added water; therefore, the meat is half-boiled and half-fried. In a similar way, spring bear meat is prepared to eliminate lousy taste. It is important to state that Evenki have prohibitions (Ev. *ngeleme*) against eating parts of certain animals. Evenki often told me that bear meat should not be given to pregnant women. Women are prohibited from eating the flesh of male musk deer or at least male musk deer liver.

During fur hunting season, a hunter would be lucky enough to snare a lynx (Ev. *sekanan*). Lynx meat is valued not as food but for its medicinal qualities. According to the elder Anna Semirekonova from Mongoi village, lynx meat is white since lynx never eats dead animals and always kills the animals it eats. It eats animals that humans also eat: rabbits (Ev. *tuksaki*), birds, and Siberian musk deer (Ev. *mekcha*). Lynx is given to a person with lung problems, tuberculosis, or chronic cough. It is boiled in water after the fur is skinned; usually, it is eaten in the evening. Squirrel is another delicious meat that is consumed during fur animals hunting season (Ev. *ulukki*). Indeed, the carcass of a squirrel is usually left on a hot iron stove soon after it is skinned, and it takes 10–15 minutes for it to turn brown. Its small body can be eaten as

a delicious snack. After a successful squirrel hunt (15–20 animals), the meat of the squirrels is boiled and prepared as a soup. When there are just a few squirrels killed, then the bodies of the carcasses are put on a hot iron stove as soon as the fur is taken off and cooked. Squirrel meat is rarely eaten as a main dish; instead, it is usually served as a snack for older people and children when they gather near the iron stove to warm themselves during the long winter evenings. Aleksei Aruneev used to collect all his squirrel carcasses in a frozen pile to bring them to his children in Tungokochen village. There, squirrels were fried on the pan after boiling and were consumed by the whole family from one pan. Indeed, eating from one frying pan is how food is shared by all people in the tent or sitting near the table. The squirrels' stomach (*Ev. gudyga*), filled with mushrooms and nuts, is considered a real delicacy.

Table 3.

THE TABLE BELOW SHOWS THE SEASONAL VARIETY OF ANIMALS KILLED AND CONSUMED BY THE VILLAGE-CENTERED FAMILY OF ALEKSEI ARUNEEV AS WELL AS THE ARUNEEV-ZHUMANEEV FAMILY OF HERDERS AND HUNTERS BASED IN THE TAIGA OF TUNGOKOCHEN DISTRICT:

<b>2004–2005</b>	<b>Hunted meat by two hunters based in village</b>	<b>Hunted meat by two hunters based in taiga</b>
Sept	1 bear, 2 elk, 1 moose	1 wild reindeer, 4 moose, 1 bear, 1 domesticated reindeer
Oct	3 moose, 1 squirrel, 1 boar, 1 rabbit	2 wild reindeer, 1 moose
Nov	1 boar, 1 roe deer, 4 rabbits, 25 squirrels	4 reindeer killed for transportation, 53 squirrels, 3 rabbits, 1 partridge 1 domesticated reindeer <sup>10</sup>
Dec	12 squirrels, 8 rabbits	1 moose, 23 squirrels, 3 rabbits, 1 capercaillie, 1 partridge
Jan	12 rabbits, 6 squirrels	1 lynx, 4 rabbits 28 squirrels, 2 partridge
Feb	3 capercaillie, 3 squirrels, 5 rabbits	1 roe deer, 12 squirrels, 3 rabbits, 1 moose, 2 partridge
Mar		
Apr		3 capercaillie
May	1 roe deer	1 moose, 2 capercaillie
June	1 moose, 1 roe deer	3 roe deer
July	1 bear, 3 boars, 3 roe deer	1 elk
August	1 moose	1 moose, 1 elk

## BUTCHERING AND MEAT PRESERVATION

If reindeer herders slaughter reindeer, it is killed in a particular way by hitting an ax over its forehead. The most experienced herder usually does it not to give the animal any pain. When the reindeer falls unconscious, his jugular is cut with a knife to make the blood run (Ev. *saksovan gada*) into a bowl. The blood is fed to the dogs or used for food. The blood is usually let sit until it congeals. Congested blood is then inserted into the intestines (Ev. *seluptal*) and the bladder (Ev. *korimuk*), and it is boiled in water. The blood (Ev. *sokso*) of reindeers and wild reindeer, and moose also has broad uses. Hunters rarely collect the blood of hunted moose, but they always gather reindeer blood. Then, the animals' guts are filled with this "jellied blood" boiled in water.

The meat of the reindeer or any other ungulates is butchered with a 30 cm long knife (Ev. *koto*), and the cuts are made through the joints. Sometimes an ax is used to cut the ribs of a moose. Olga Zhumaneeva said that though all the reindeer meat is consumed, the marrow taken from domesticated reindeer bones is not eaten by her because it is taboo for women to eat the marrow of domesticated reindeer. Hunters and herders can also leave bones unbroken as they believe that the animal will be reborn again and will need all of his bones. After the blood is gathered in a bowl, a long cut (Ev. *uktoda*) is made with a knife (Ev. *koto*) starting from the neck down to the foot. Usually, the flanks (Ev. *ikdo*) of the animal have been skinned; the penis (Ev. *chivkan*) and the tail (Ev. *irgi*, R. *khvost*) are removed. Then the intestines are cleaned out (Ev. *silugada*). The lungs (Ev. *ovsal*, R. *lekhkie*) and the heart (Ev. *megan*, R. *serdtse*) are removed separately. The liver (Ev. *oligon*, R. *pechen'*), kidneys (Ev. *bosoktol*, R. *pochki*), and abdomen meat (Ev. *gudyne*, R. *briushina*) are removed next. Then the gallbladder (Ev. *delkin*, R. *selezenka*), intestines (Ev. *siluktal*, R. *kishki*), and rectum (Ev. *moman*, R. *priamaia kishka*) are removed. The rectum is very valued for its high-fat content. After that, the backbone (Ev. *dalu*, R. *lopatki*) with hind legs (Ev. *isakil*) are removed and are cut into two parts. Then, the upper half of the torso consisting of the rib case and chest area (Ev. *tynglan*) is separated from the lower half of the torso. Two *sigda* (sinews with back meat) are removed, as are the ribs (Ev. *avtural*, R. *rebra*). Finally, the head (Ev. *dyl*, R. *golova*) is cut, and the head scalp (Ev. *igda dyluva*) is removed. The head is also fleshed. The lower jaw (Ev. *dzhioil*, R. *chelust'*) is removed with the tongue (Ev. *inni*, R. *iazyk*). Then the eyes (Ev. *esal*, R. *glaza*) are cut out. Cutting the eyes is a meaningful action which has cosmological significance. Evenki says that animals should not see what is going on with their bodies. Therefore, it is crucial to cut the eyes out to avoid offending the animal's spirit. Bear eyes are also often cut and placed on a tree. Then the nose (Ev. *lusma*) so that the head is split into two pieces along (stuff means) a particular bone (Ev. *dulindy*, R. *cherepushka*). The neck is also separated





Fig. 3. Aleksei Aruneev removing fat gut moman from harvested moose carcass.  
Photo by D. Brandišauskas, 2005.

(Ev. *nikimnia*, R. *sheia*), and the vertebrae (Ev. *niagdāl*, R. *pozvonok*) are removed.

Then hunters cut the belly, separating it (Ev. *darama*) from the remaining flesh, and cut the femur (Ev. *diuroo*). First, they cut the front legs (Ev. *nihil*) into pieces and then continue to the back legs (Ev. *amargul*). The skin is removed from the leg (Ev. *osi*, R. *kamus*), and the important meat of the leg (Ev. *chichan*) is removed. The thigh portion of the leg (Ev. *deganiushki*) is separated from the calf portion (Ev. *priamushki*) and the hoofs (Ev. *kogchon*, R. *kopyta*). The last part that is taken for food is the bone marrow (Ev. *uman*, R. *chumuga*). The hunters do not use an ax for butchering — just a knife.

When meat is butchered in autumn, all parts of the flesh of large animals are hung on trees or put on fallen logs in order to avoid them becoming dirty. If the animal is a reindeer or roe deer, pieces of meat may be placed on a carpet of green tree branches. The meat of roe, moose, or elk is usually cut into eight pieces to be transported: two front legs, two ribs, two hind legs, the middle part, and the head, often with the neck. All leftovers that are not eaten by dogs after skinning are disposed of by putting them into the river or naturally formed water pit. The neck of roe deer, moose, and elk is often fed to dogs, but sometimes it is also used as meat for soup. When meat is shared, the neck is never given to other people as a gift. Hunters believe that such an action would be very offensive and would mean that a person does not want to share meat in the future. Aleksei Aruneev shared his meat with nine people after



Fig. 4. Aleksei Aruneev fleshing male roe deer (R. kozel) near River Kontala in autumn. Photo by D. Brandišauskas, 2005

our successful autumn hunt when we brought back to the village half a male moose and an entire young female elk carcass. He shared meat with his elderly uncle and ill aunt, his wife's mother, his boss, neighbors, and friends. Other meat was given to people who asked for it. Among seven Evenki households of Bugunda village (Buriatia) one special space was used for meat butchering and sharing. Hence, a master — a hunter will always cut meat while others wait with bags. The meat is parceled in pieces, and all bags are equally filled with it. Family members, usually teenagers, deliver meat to every household. It is almost impossible to transport meat to a village or camp in warm periods without initial preservation. The use of salt helps sometimes; however, large chunks of an animal are either smoked or dried in the hope of forming a dried crust over the meat to prevent rotting. If meat is transported to a camp successfully, it may also be put into an aluminum can and buried deep into the ground. Sometimes the cans are placed in special ditches lined with logs (Ev. *saiva*). Such ditches exist in almost every summer reindeer herder's camp and near to log huts. The meat can be kept in such a way for 2–4 weeks.

For preservation, the meat of hunted ungulates can also be cut into long, thin strips and dried in a camp not far from the kill site. Such pieces are often hung on special racks (Ev. *lokovun ulderuk*) and dried under smoke for a minimum of 3–4 days when hunters are in a temporary campsite. Hunters maintain smoke by burning a small fire under the meat. Reindeer herders sometimes use this fireplace for cooking dog food or boiling tea to give the best amount of heat for rapid meat drying in the taiga camp. Such light smoking can be performed using only small branches of alder (Ev. *dulgikta*, R. *olkha*) and sometimes willow (Ev. *mar*). Hunters do not use birch (Ev. *chalban*, R. *berioza*), larch (Ev. *irakta*, R. *listvenitsa*), or cedar (Ev. *bulgikta*, R. *kedr*) in the pitch. Such dried meat is referred to as *sirna* by Evenki; however, in a village, such dried meat is misnamed as *kukura*, an Evenki word for boiled and then dried meat. One can produce about 20–25 kg of dried meat from hunted moose, and it takes about 3–4 days to make *sirna*. Such meat serves as fast food for any occasion. One can consume it as a snack, spending the night on the platform at the salt lick site (Ev. *taloi*, R. *solonets*). *Sirna* can be softened with an ax and boiled, producing valuable soup.

Another type of preservation consists of boiling the meat and then drying it next to the fireplace in the summertime. Such meat can be pounded with an ax into ground meat, almost with the consistency of flour. This dish is called *toli* by the Evenki. Boiled and dried meat can also be mixed with specially prepared fat that is made from ribs, vertebrae, pelvic bones, and other bones. Bones are usually boiled in water, and fat is skimmed from the water. Such fat never melts at any temperature. Evenki call this dish *changmi*. Both ways of preparation have a long duration of preservation. Leftovers from skinning an animal (skin, head, and parts of intestines) are always brought to a river or submerged in water. Water prevents fast decay and the foul smell that can attract bears, wolves,

and ermines to the area. Therefore, all signs of butchering are always cleaned up. Evenki hunters always say that it is “poaching” (R. *brakon’erstvo*) when pieces of an animal’s body are left scattered over a site and when eatable parts are wasted. Evenki say that such hunters risk losing their hunting luck (Ev. *kutu*). The bad smell from rotting leftovers can also frighten hunted animals. Dogs chew on these bones (Ev. *giramdal*) frequently but never eat them completely. Such bones are gathered and often burned or are placed at the roots (Ev. *nelge*) of a tree, so that reindeer would not hurt his feet on the sharp bones. Nikolai Aruneev told me when we were eating reindeer meat that it was a sin (Ev. *ngelemo*) to give bone fat to dogs since you can offend the “master of taiga.” According to Aleksei Aruneev, dogs are also not given the heart of a lynx because it makes dogs slower. The trachea (Ev. *bilga*, R. *pishchevod*) of ungulates are not given since a dog may lose their ability to smell.

Table 4.

THE TABLE BELOW REPRESENTS THE MAIN ANIMAL PARTS USED FOR FOOD AMONG THE EVENKI OF ZABAİKAL REGION AND BURIATIA REPUBLIC.

	Reindeer/ Wild reindeer	Stir	Musk deer	Elk	Moose	Boar	Bear
Head (Ev. dyl)	Consumed for food	Con- sumed for food or given to dogs	Con- sumed for food or given to dogs	Consumed for food or given to dogs	Con- sumed for food	Con- sumed for food or given to dogs	Can be cooked, left on labaz or hanged on tree
Brains (Ev. taraki)	Consumed for food	Con- sumed for food or given to dogs	Con- sumed for food or given to dogs	Consumed for food	Con- sumed for food	Given to dogs	Can be eaten
Guts (Ev. lyluptal)	Consumed or given to dogs	Given to dogs	Given to dogs	Parts con- sumed (Ev. moman) other given to dogs	Parts con- sumed (Ev. moman) other given to dogs	Dogs or thrown away	No uses, one gut is cooked among Oro- chens of Bugunda village
Bone fat (Ev. uman)	Consumed for food	No	No	Consumed for food	Con- sumed for food	No	No

End of Tab. 4

Inner fat (Ev. uluivcha)	Consumed for food	No	No	Consumed for food	Consumed for food	Rarely consumed for food	Consumed as medicine
Liver and kidneys (Ev. bososkto and Ev. olion)	Consumed for food, often raw	Consumed for food (raw)	Consumed for food, often raw, women are not given	Consumed for food, often raw, mostly evaluated in autumn taken from male elk since it is fat	Consumed for food or skin tanning	Given for dogs	No
Meat fat (Ev. umukso)	No meat fat	No meat fat	No meat fat	No meat fat	No meat fat	Consumed for food	Consumed for food
Special uses	Penis, soft antlers panty (cut in April-May) can be sold to merchants or used in curing different diseases. Evenki believes that penis and ends of hoofs can cure male diseases		Evenki sell struia to traders, and they also use it as medicine. Struia is said to be used in China for fragrance production	Penis and panty (soft male elk antlers) are sold to traders or used for healing various ailments, such as high blood pressure. They are considered good for strengthening the human organism in general 150gr of dry panty is poured with 500 gr vodka and left in a dark place for ten days.	The upper lip is sold as a delicacy.		Skin is sold as a trophy, and feet are sold to China where they are used as medicine Spleen of bear is also widely used among Evenki and Buriat and exported to China as medicine for curing liver disease. Intestine fat (Ev. uluivcha, R. zhyr)

End of Tab. 4

				Consumed one spoon per day.			is used to heal lung diseases, cough, and exhaustion.
Meat (uldo)	Consumed for food	Consumed for food	Consumed for food	Consumed for food	Consumed for food	Consumed for food	Consumed for food in later summer, autumn and winter then it is fattest. It tastes badly in spring and when mating.
Skin (nanda)	Used as mattress (Ev. girkovun), sold for kommersanty	Clothing	Gloves	Kamus used for winter shoe unty production	Kamus for unty, skin for winter shoe amchiury, winter outdoor clothing and ropes	Used as mattress	Used as a mattress, sold to merchants
Blood (sokso)	Is gathered for human consumption or dog food (Ev. dalavun)	Not gathered	Not gathered	Is gathered rarely and often given to dogs because of time shortage	Is gathered rarely and often given to dogs because of time shortage	Not gathered	Not gathered

Lungs (ovsol)	Consumed for food	Consumed for food	Consumed for food	Consumed for food	Consumed for food or given to dogs	Given to dogs	Buried on platform (Ev. delken)
Heart (mevan)	Consumed for food	Consumed for food	Given to dogs	Consumed for food	Consumed for food or given to dogs	Given to dogs	Buried on platform
Stomach (gudyga)	Consumed for food	Given to dogs	Given to dogs	Given to dogs	Consumed for food or given to dogs	Given to dogs	Buried on platform

## SEASONAL DISHES AND DELICACIES

In autumn, most animals gain extra fat for winter. Hunters highly value such generated fat by the bear and boar. If a hunter kills a bear or boar in autumn, their fat is separated from the meat and cooked. Most people prefer to eat it frozen after it is cooked. Hunters say that one can have just a small piece of such fat and feel full for the entire day. Hunters warn that one should not overeat bear's meat since one will not be able to sleep and bad dreams may come to him.

Some food can be eaten only on certain occasions, and there are types of rare food that are linked to a specific festival. Thus, when herders harvest a bear in the winter period, they cook its brain, lungs, heart, and inner fat (cut into small pieces), making a rich dish called *asimin*. Since bear has a special place in Evenki cosmology and daily life (see Brandišauskas 2017a), such dishes are consumed in a particular manner with certain ritual attributes and respect. Bear paws (Ev. *mania*) are also valued and are a delicious dish usually made by boiling them. Yurii Chernoev from Kholodnoe village, a reindeer herder, told me the most delicious paws come from bears killed in the spring. Bear paws also have a high market value and are an object of export to China; therefore, most hunters freeze them and sell them to traders. The bear's head is often stored on a platform (R. *labaz*, Ev. *delken*) for ritual purposes. Nikolai Dimitrov from the Evenki village of Bugunda said that he always preferred to cook the rectum (Ev. *moman*) of a bear on fire.

Elk (Ev. *bugun*, R. *iziubr*) is another animal known as being fatty in autumn. Not every stomach can process it and not all villagers eat it: elk meat is not given to newcomers. I heard the following advice on many occasions: “do not drink water that is not boiled after you ate elk meat.” Indeed, at the beginning of my fieldwork, I used to get ill almost whenever I ate elk or reindeer meat.



Fig. 5. Olga Zhumaneeva taking care of meat drying rack *lokovun ulderuk* near Bugarikhta river.  
Photo by D. Brandišauskas, 2004.

When hunting moose is the most active in autumn, people cut moose noses and lips (*Ev. omun*, *R. guba*) from harvested moose heads. These parts of the moose have a high market price in cities. Chita restaurants serve a specialty made of moose lips supplied by traders. Moose lips are also exported to China. As a result, village-based hunters often freeze the lips and keep them until traders visit. Moose lips are usually scorched by the fire and boiled for 2–4 hours until becoming a jellylike shape. In springtime, soft velvet antlers (*Ev. ie*) of wild reindeer can also be cooked and consumed for food.

Evenki herders milk female reindeer. Milking can be done from the middle of spring to late autumn. Female reindeer can give 300–400 grams of milk (*Ev. ukumny*) per day. Reindeer milk is considered one of the biggest delicacies and a rich source of protein. Since it has a very high percentage of fat, Evenki stir it with berries producing a creamy treat called *manty*, also known as *korchik*. Today this dish is an inseparable part of different indigenous festivals and is proudly served as a food representing Evenki culture. Reindeer herders make sour cream and butter from reindeer milk. Elders remember that milk in birch bark containers used to be hung around the reindeer's necks. The butter would be churned while the reindeer traveled to a new campsite. In the past, elders, who had access to large reindeer herds, produced dried reindeer milk. Milk was also cooked to prepare dry cottage cheese called *iltsia*. The milk was boiled for a long time until it was dried on the tin and turned into powder. Such a product could be stored for a long time. Assorted larch bark



bowls are still used as milk containers. However, not every female reindeer is easy to milk. As Gena Dushinov from Tungokochen village told me, children used to keep the reindeer calves from sucking the rear teats, to secure milk for the humans.

The particular way that Evenki use meat for food depends on the time of the year and how much meat is available. In a poor season, the lungs of moose can be cut and used to cook meat pies for the winter. In summer, the lungs can be fed to dogs since they are hard to transport in warm weather. When a hunt is very successful, a hunter might keep only the meat and give all the intestines to the dogs. Some animals, such as bears and boars, are eaten only in certain months. Boar is best to consume from July to November. At other times, it lacks fat, or it is at mating time (December) when the meat has a bad smell. Bear meat is the best to consume almost all the year except for April and March when it is lean. However, today bear meat becomes dangerous due to the widespread trichinosis, and some of the younger generation Evenki do not risk eating it. As I mentioned, all ungulates are best in autumn when they gain the most weight and fat.

Hunters also cook the trachea (Ev. *kavka*) of migrating birds. The trachea is first filled with cut meat and cooked next to the fire as *silavun*. Especially valued is the meat of the white partridge in winter. Elders say that people who have an illness of the throat should drink the blood of the white partridge raw. Rabbit (Ev. *tuksaki*) is a popular food in winter since hunters snare rabbits. Over the long fur hunting season (mid-November to mid-February), hunters caught 32 rabbits, squirrels, and sables while staying in a log house. All the meat was consumed for food, and it was eaten twice a week. If hunters and herders have enough ungulate meat, then rabbit meat can be fed to the dogs and is served only once every two weeks. The meat was boiled and then fried on the pan once or twice per day. Evenki always shoot rabbits or forest birds that cross their way (Ev. *okto*). They believe that not taking an opportunity to shoot was is given by nature and being fussy about what you hunt would result in bad luck (Ev. *kutu*).

Fish (Ev. *oldo*) is rarely eaten by Evenki of Zabaikal Region and is mainly consumed by communities that live next to big rivers, especially the Vitim River (villages of Ust'-Karenga, Iumurchen, Krasnyi Iar, Bugunda). Some elders say that they never liked fish. Indeed, nomadic reindeer herders spend most of their time in the highlands; therefore, the potential fishing season is short. As Nikolai Aruneev told me, it is enough to have a good fish meal (R. *khorocho pokushat'*) only a couple of times per year. Fish is usually caught when it migrates from big rivers to highlands and vice versa. However, reindeer herders can only fish in midsummer since that is when the fish reach the highland rivers. There is a wide variety of fish in Northern Zabaikal region, including (Ev. *dzhiali*, R. *taimen*), burbot (Ev. *laptuki*, R. *nalim*), (Ev. *maigu*, R. *lenok*), grayling (Ev. *niru*, R. *kharius*). Many types of fish can also be found

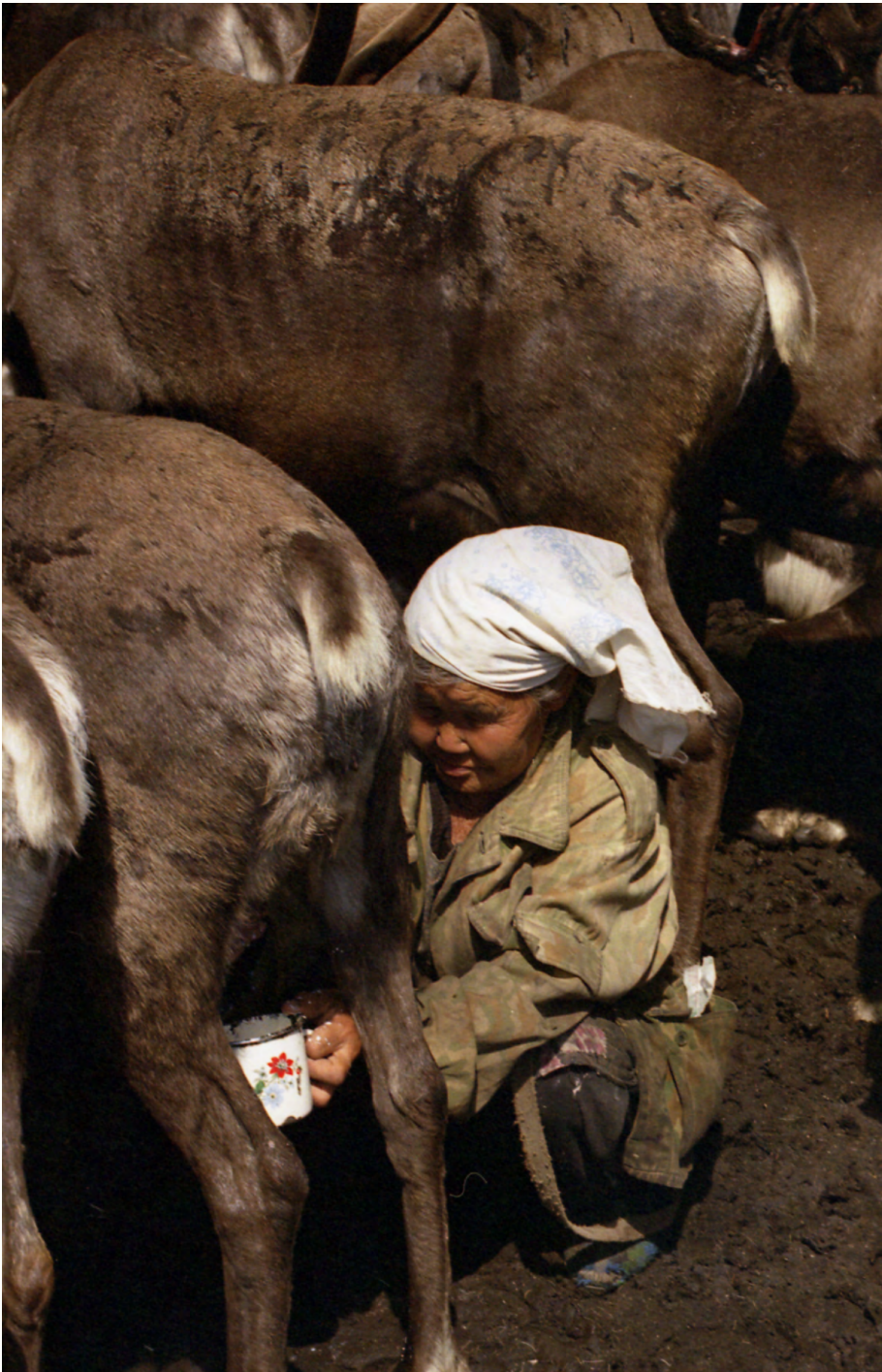


Fig. 6. Olga Zhumanceva milking a reindeer. Photo by D. Brandišauskas, 2004.

in lakes such as perch (Ev. *kulimte*, R. *okun*), crucian carp (Ev. *giramdachi*, R. *karas*'), (Ev. *kundukan*, R. *galian*), pike (Ev. *chirukaia*, R. *shiuka*). Small fish is usually cooked without removing their guts to save fat. Bigger fish is cooked next to the fire or fried in the pan. When I stayed at the River Taloi summer reindeer herders' camp (Buriatia), fish was eaten often. Fishing is an activity performed by children with a self-made rod almost every day in summer. However, in the Kotomchik reindeer herders' camp (Zabaikal Region), fish is eaten only about once a month in the summer. Reindeer herders invest more time hunting for meat rather than fishing. Additionally, hunters say that fish are hard to store in the summer and that eating them does not make you feel full. Fishing with nets is done in autumn mainly by village hunters while at the same time they are hunting moose or elk during the rut. This hunting is most often done along big rivers such as the Karenga, Nercha, or Vitim. Hunters who have hunting cabins near lakes called *dzhemkun* also spend some time fishing crucian and carp. I have seen a deep pit dug in the soil that was filled with plastic bags of fish in autumn time. Hunters from Bugunda and Ust'-Karenga located near the Vitim River, fish with motorboats after their autumn meat hunting is done. They salt their fish in big aluminum cans and then store them in cold pits under wooden houses in the village. At Bugunda village, located on the shore of the Vitim River, it is teenagers who fish. They smoke the fish in special casks. They fish with nets and rods near the river bent where cold water comes from highlands and where fish comes in the summer.

#### CONCLUSION

My aim was to provide an overview of the richness of the everyday taiga diet of nomadic Evenki reindeer herders and hunters living in the Zabaikal region and Buriatia forest. The nomadic lifestyle of Evenki relies on a variety of traditional patterns of food to harvest, preserve, prepare, store and consume. Despite the loss of reindeer stocks and the degradation of the environment, Evenki see the food linked to the taiga harvest as the main source of physical strength, energy, and wellbeing for the indigenous communities. Various dishes made from taiga animals, berries, and plants are seen to be the most desired, tasty, and enjoyable food to eat. These foods are also crucial sources of vitamins, fats, and proteins. As described above, the nomadic Evenki diet includes raw flesh foods throughout the year. Consumption of animals entails an intimate interaction with animals, their bodies, their master-spirits, and with other humans. Hence, animals are perceived as sentient beings and cosmological actors as well as sources for healing. Through the harvesting of game animals, Evenki gain essential knowledge about their shared living environment and the potentialities of the taiga for providing for their wellbeing. Hence, eating game animals equals participation in the circle of procreation that still requires moral behavior and involves vernacular practices of reciprocity, sharing, and the

generation of hunting luck. For these reasons, the consumption of wild meat from the different animals is inseparable from the sense of being an Evenki and being part of the land.

**Acknowledgments:** This article is dedicated to the memory of Evenki hunter Aleksei Aruneev who shared taiga food and friendship with me for many years. This research was supported by the Vilnius University Research Promotion Fund Nr. MSF-LMT-1/2020 and Lithuania Research Council P-MIP-21-49.

#### REFERENCES

Brandišauskas D. [Old technologies and modern production of taiga equipment among the Evenks of Transbaikalia]. *Izvestiia laboratorii drevnikh tekhnologii* [News of the laboratory of ancient technologies], 2017, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 44–57. (In Russian).

Brandišauskas D. *Leaving footprints in the taiga: luck, rituals and ambivalence among Orochen-Evenki*. Berghahn Press: Oxford, New York, 2017. (In English).

Brandišauskas, D. Contested health in the post-Soviet taiga: use of landscape, spirits and strength among Orochen-Evenki of Zabaikal'e (East Siberia). In D. G. Anderson *Health and Healing in the Circumpolar North: Southeastern Siberia*. Alberta University Press. 2011, pp. 125–144. (In English).

Brandišauskas, D. Hide tanning and its use in taiga: the case of Orochen-Evenki reindeer herders and hunters of Zabaikal'e (East Siberia). *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics*, 2010, vol. 42, pp. 97–114. (In English).

Brandišauskas, D. Symbolism and Ecological Uses of Fire among Orochen-Evenki. *Sibirica*, 2007, vol. 6 no. 1, pp. 95–109. (In English).

Lavrillier, Alexandra and Semen Gabyshev. *An Arctic Indigenous Knowledge System of Landscape, Climate, and Human interactions. Evenki Reindeer Herders and Hunters*. Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology, Kulturstiftung Sibirien, Fürstenberg/Havel, Germany, 2017. (In English).

Popov N. *Pishcha tungusov / Vostochno-Sibirskii Otdel Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obshchestva* [Food of the Tungus / East Siberian Department of the Russian Geographical Society]. Irkutsk, 1926. (In Russian).

Samokhin A. T. [Tungus of the Bodaibo district]. *Sibirskaiia zhivaia starina* [Siberian living antiquity], 1929, no. 8–9, pp. 5–66.

Shubin A. S. *Evenki* [Evenki]. Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaia Tipografiia Publ., 2007. (In Russian).

Submitted: 17.11.2021

Accepted: 28.12.2021

Article published: 01.04.2022