

Oral presentation

Ethnobotany in the Central Canadian Arctic: A survey of the plants used by the Copper Inuit

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Introduction. Ethnobotanical research has seldom been conducted in Arctic environments. The Copper Inuit are a sub-population of Canadian Inuit who inhabit the area surrounding the Coronation Gulf in the Kitikmeot Region of Nunavut, Canada. Prior to recent settlement and acculturation, the Copper Inuit were nomadic hunter-gatherers. Despite a departure from nomadism, the culture has maintained the practice of subsistence hunting and gathering. This tie to the environment makes the Copper Inuit an interesting subject for ethnobotanical research.

Objectives. To document the use of plants in the traditional medicine, diet, and material culture of the Copper Inuit.

Methods. An ethnobotanical survey was conducted in the Hamlet of Kugluktuk, Nunavut. Five hunters, four community elders, and a single traditional healer were selected to participate in the study. Data was gathered through unstructured interviews, participant observation, and voucher specimen collection.

Results. Uses were documented for 20 plant species contained in 15 families. Thirteen species representing 12 families were used medicinally. Seal-oil and water were commonly mixed with both fresh and dried plant material for administration of medicinal plants. Seven species from six families were eaten. Seven species/types were used as cultural items for shelters, sleds, wicks, insulation, and fuel.

Conclusion. The Copper Inuit use plants to supplement the materials harvested from the regional fauna which represents the primary biotic resource of the culture. Plants are an integral component of traditional Copper Inuit medicine and serve an important role by providing variety in diet and material culture.

Keywords: ethnomedicine, Kugluktuk, Kitikmeot, Nunavut

Selected References

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