

PLANT HUNTING: “EVENKI MEDICINES” IN NORTHERN BAIKAL

Keywords: ethnomedicine, medicinal plants, Evenkis, Northern Baikal, autonomy, mobility, hunting luck, *Gentiana algida*, *Rhodiola rosea*

The article discusses the attitudes of the Northern Baikal Evenkis toward the flora, formed by the situation of relative autonomy. The focus is on plants that people use in medical practice and are in great demand. The article examines the knowledge of the Northern Baikal Evenkis about the healing properties of two plants that they consider universal medicines – *Gentiana algida* and *Rhodiola rosea*, sometimes called as the “Evenki” medicines”. It considers human interactions with these medicinal plants in the context of mobility, as well as human, animal and landscape relations, and describes the practice of their harvesting by hunters and reindeer herders. The Evenki hunting ethos and ideas about hunting luck are part of the system of relations between humans and the environment and manifest themselves in the practice of searching for and collecting medicinal plants. Local knowledge about their beneficial properties was formed under the influence of observations of animals’ behaviour. The strategies for the use of medical devices and the practice of prevention and treatment of diseases by Evenkis were formed under conditions of constant resource shortages. Reindeer husbandry and hunting demanded that people in constant motion improve the skills of maintaining a relative autonomy that is a certain type of attitude towards resources as well as medicines, based on minimizing their consumption. In such conditions, medicines with a wide spectrum of action turned out to be especially in demand.

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It is common knowledge that plants have always occupied an important position in the ethnomedical practice of various groups of Evenkis – different researchers have paid attention to their good knowledge of the local flora for a long time. Back in 1873, A.L. Chekanovsky, who collected plant samples in the Lower Tunguska River Basin, recorded their Evenki names and marked their healing properties (*Vasilevich 1969: 187*). Nevertheless, despite the fact that the local flora was widely used by Evenkis in the treatment of diseases, only general, incomplete information about this can be found in the academic literature (*Namzalov et al. 2017: 52*). There are only a few publications emphasizing the special role of plants in Evenki ethnomedical practices (*Namzalov et al. 2013, 2017; Bakhanova 2009; Dmitrieva 2006; Kolosovsky 1990*).

This article includes materials collected by the author within 15 months (during the period from 2007 to 2018) of field research in the Severobaikal’skii raion of the Republic of Buryatia. The main methods included observation and semi-structured interviews.

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The author of the article worked among Evenkis – hunters and reindeer breeders – in national villages and on the territories of the Evenki obshchinas (clan communities) “Oron” and “Uluki”. This article discusses the practices of the North Baikal Evenkis associated with the collection, processing and use of universal “Evenki medicines” – two medicinal plants – *Gentiana algida* and *Rhodiola rosea*.

“Medical pluralism”

Before proceeding directly to the consideration of the herborization methods, as well as obtaining and using medicinal plants, it is important to focus on the fact how the Evenkis of Northern Baikal perceive medical practices. Also, it is necessary to figure out what means are used in case of different needs. In general, the current situation can be described as “medical pluralism” (Anderson 2011). Local people do not oppose official medicine and folk medicine, they use any information and do not neglect any available means.

The first permanently practicing paramedics appeared on Northern Baikal at the beginning of the XX century. Many of them worked as teachers in schools in parallel. A serious step towards the creation of a medical care system in the region was the formation in 1925 of mobile medical groups by the Russian Red Cross Society and the People’s Commissariat of Health (Shubin 2001: 104). In the early Soviet period, the regional authorities organized several expeditions to collect data on the health of Evenkis. In 1925–1927, physicians Perevodchikov (1925), Agrovsky (1926–1927) and Ogint (NARB 1:49) worked in the group sent to the Baunt Evenkis. In 1927, a graduate of the Saratov Medical Institute, Agrovsky began working with the Kindigir Evenkis in a new small hospital built in the village of Dushkachan (Shubin 2001: 104, 105; AMAE: 31, 42) – the entire hospital staff at that time consisted of two people (AMAE: 30ob.).

It is known that in the early 1920s, the Shamagir Evenkis from the village of Tompa, who lived on the northeastern shore of Lake Baikal, belonged to the clinic No. 7, located 133 km south of the village (NARB 3:26). At that time, it was a formal registration, and few of those assigned to the hospital visited it because of the great distance. Since the local population (Evenkis and Buryats) needed constant medical care, in 1926 a small medical center with five beds was opened in the village of Tompa. However, for example, in 1927 the paramedic worked in the village only in August, and in the next eight months, he came only once and only for a week (Ibid.).

Nevertheless, the regional authorities did not abandon the idea of organizing medical care for the local population. As part of the implementation of this task, despite the shortage of specialists, permanent medical posts were created in large settlements. Quite often, those who worked in them did not have a medical education and did not know how to treat patients. For example, local people were afraid of the director Nikulin of the Nizhneangarskii medical center, who unknowingly regularly prescribed the wrong medicines (NARB 2: 102–103), and in the villages of Kumora and Goremyka (contemporary Baikal’skoe) people who did not trust the specialists of the points opened in the mid-1920s preferred to go to healers and sorcerers (NARB 2). Therefore, V. Neupokoev wrote that they turned to a shaman or were treated independently using medicinal plants (Neupokoev 1928: 10). It can be stated that in the early Soviet period, for healing from various ailments, Evenkis used knowledge distributed among representatives of the local community, not least related to medicinal plants. At the same time, if necessary, people turned to doctors. As V. Neupokoev wrote, “Tungus, especially a man, has already realized the benefits of European medicine and, whenever possible, always willingly goes for medical help” (Ibid.: 10). It should be noted that, despite the permanent medical centers opened in the 1920s and 1930s in the dwellers of Northern Baikal, hunters and reindeer herders, who spent a significant part of their time in the taiga, continued to use traditional medicine for the most part.

Folk medicine turned out to be in demand again after the collapse of the Soviet system, when medicines in pharmacies became much more expensive. During this period, many local residents who lost their jobs had to rely mainly on their own knowledge. Today, medical specialists in rural areas are highly respected, and since they are well versed in folk remedies, they often recommend “the Evenki medicines” to their patients for the treatment of various diseases along with official drugs (*Davydov 2011: 133*). Local paramedics use not only plants, but also animal products and minerals, and sometimes share their stocks of such funds with those in need. From what has been said above, it can be concluded that the boundary between **official medicine and folk medicine** in the studied community is blurred.

Universal medicines



According to the informant from the village of Kholodnoe, Pana Platonovna Lekareva, the North Baikal Evenkis learned to distinguish medicinal plants and learn how to use them from childhood. Different groups of Evenkis used herbal preparations for the treatment of fever, diseases of the cardiovascular system, skin, and some venereal diseases (*Tugolukov 1969: 97*). Each medicine had its own spectrum of action: an infusion of the leaves of wild rosemary was used for cough (*Ibid.*); larch resin – in order to improve digestion, quench thirst and cleanse the oral cavity (*Simonova et al. 2016: 148*); the root of badan – in the case of stomach pains (*Davydov 2011: 143*); wormwood – as a remedy for diarrhea (*Dyrchikova 2014: 82*); tea from lingonberry leaves, as well as chaga – as diuretics (*Ibid.*). Having analyzed the use of medicinal plants in medical practices on the example of the Barguzin Evenkis, B.-Ts.B. Namzalov and E.F. Afanas'eva come to the conclusion that people used them most often for the treatment of colds, pulmonary and renal-urolithiasis (*Namzalov, Afanas'eva 2013: 153*).

They employed herbal remedies not only for ingestion, but also externally – as rubbing, for compresses, wound treatment. It is known, for example, that sore spots were rubbed with a round birch stick (*Neupokoev 1928: 10*). While preparing medicines, Evenkis often mixed plants with fat and other animal products (bile, etc.) (*Tugolukov 1969: 96, 97*). Thus, they treated wounds with special ointments made from spruce or cedar sap mixed with bear fat and crushed needles (*Dyrchikova 2014: 82*).

Strategies for the use of medicines and practices for the prevention and treatment of diseases among Evenkis were formed in conditions of a constant shortage of resources. Reindeer husbandry and hunting required people in constant motion to maintain life in conditions of relative autonomy, which developed a certain type of attitude to everything that nature gives people (including medical supplies), based on minimizing consumption. Therefore, plants that helped in the fight against a whole set of ailments were especially useful. The North Baikal Evenkis had the knowledge that allowed them to find such plants and be treated independently, without help from outside.

Ianda (Lat. *Gentiana algida*), which is one of the subspecies of mountain champ, is considered by the North Baikal Evenkis to be a universal remedy. Dwellers of the Kholodnoe village believe that it is effective in the treatment of most diseases. Thus, gentian, according to P.P. Lekareva “will cure everything, only the severed intestines cannot heal”. Local people even tell a story about a hunter who, with the help of ianda, was able to reduce the appendicitis pain when he was staying in the forest – two days on foot – as he was trying to reach the village in order to get medical help. Feeling pain in the right side of his stomach, the hunter brewed tea from ianda, which he found in the winter hut.



Decoctions are prepared from ianda; with their help, colds are treated on Northern Baikal, the development of inflammatory processes is restrained, diseases of the gastrointestinal tract are treated and prevented. The infusion of ianda is also used for many ailments (*Sofronov 2008*). Gentian lowers the temperature, normalizes blood pressure in hypotension. The North Baikal Evenkis also used ianda in healing lung diseases (*Shubin 2007: 169*). It is believed that this plant is especially useful for children and the elderly. The Reindeer herder Leonid

Tulbukonov recalled that when he was a child, his grandmother gave him an infusion of ianda in a spoon – almost every day. According to local people, ianda may not be suitable for some patients, however. For example, informants do not recommend using it at high pressure.

Ianda is a perennial plant, one of the medicines that have found their use in conditions of relative remoteness of some Evenki groups from large settlements. Similar tactics of maintaining the independence of existence characterize many nomadic communities of Siberia and the Arctic (Davydov *et al.* 2021). A set of life support strategies focused on a wide range of possibilities for using both available funds and those coming from outside is the most important component of local autonomy regimes (*Ibid.*).

Thus, B.-Ts.B. Namzalov, E.F. Afanas'eva and T.T. Taisaev noted that the Barguzin Evenks used various types of gentian for medicinal purposes (Namzalov *et al.* 2013: 206, 2017: 52, 53). The informants from the village of Kholodnoe also talked about medicinal plants “similar to ianda”, but with blue flowers. It is likely that in different places “ianda” means different gentian subspecies. Y. Khvashevsky identifies ianda as *Gentiana alga* and *Gentiana uniflora* (Khvashevsky 2017). Although ianda has special flowers, according to local people, it can be confused with other (similar) plants. The pickers in this case try the plants: ianda is characterized by a special bitter taste that cannot be confused with any other herb.

An old Evenki Arkady Petrovich Lekarev, who worked as a director of a reindeer farm in Soviet times and was elected a deputy of the district (aimachnyi) council, was considered an expert on the places where gentian grows. Arkady Petrovich was one of the most respected residents of the village, he was spoken of with respect as “Amaka Grandfather / Bear”. Therefore, Amaka considered ianda as “the main medicine of the Evenkis”. In his opinion, the word “ianda” means “the best medical herb”, according to P.P. Lekareva, it is translated as “mountain grass”. On Northern Baikal, as well as in neighboring regions, the plant is often called as “The Tungus grass”. Additionally, Khvashchevsky in his Internet article “Where shamanic herbs bloom ...” writes about the similarity of the folk name of the plant “ianda” with the toponym “Ianda” (a mountain on the border of the Kansk and Irbeyskiy districts of the Krasnoyarskiy krai) and with the Evenki word “ianda”, which still exists, meaning “a fire that was kindled during shamanistic ritual” (Khvashchevsky 2017). According to G.M. Vasilevich, the Evenki words “iaian (shaman), iaia (to perform a shamanistic ritual) have a connection with the word ianda-janda (big bonfire), near which the rituals of turning to fire, inherited by shamans, were previously performed” (Vasilevich 1971: 59).

Ianda is a rare perennial plant growing mainly along the shores of reservoirs in high-altitude valleys. It is often picked by male hunters and reindeer herders by order of women (Sirina, Fondal 2010: 20). The places where ianda grows are kept secret from outsiders (this knowledge of great value), people only vaguely indicate that it can be found in the mountains. Since the author of the article participated in a hike for ianda and the golden root to one of the lakes in the mountain valley, he was asked to name the places he visited with the harvesters. The plants are harvested from the beginning of August to the beginning of September, until they have “outgrown”. Later, they begin to turn red and yellow and lose their juice.

Reindeer herders and hunters know the places where ianda grows well. In summer, they make stocks of it and then bring dry grass to the village to relatives and friends. In the Soviet period, reindeer were grazed in the valleys of the Gasan-Diakit, Niurundukan, Chaia, Tyia and Andoka Rivers – in these places, reindeer herders pick gentian.

Another universal “Evenki medicine”, which is in great demand in Northern Baikal, is golden root, *Rhodiola rosea*, growing along the banks of mountain rivers and streams. P.P. Lekareva said that her grandparents used the plant in order to treat flatulence. Now the local people consider the “golden root” to be a universal remedy – “you may drink from everything” despite the fact that the stems and leaves of *Rhodiola rosea* have medicinal properties, the local people harvest only the roots. They are dug out with a knife or with hands.

Local dwellers interpret the name of this medicinal plant in different ways. Pana Platonova reported that in Evenki language the golden root is named as uildyn, which means, in her opinion, “appeared”, “grown up”. P.P. Lekareva believes that its name – uildyun – comes from the word u (“liver”) and translates as “treating the liver”. In the dictionary of G.M. Vasilevich, “uildyn” has the meanings like “connection”, “bundle” (*Vasilevich 1958: 433*). This interpretation is quite consistent with the practice of harvesting of this medicinal plant: on Northern Baikal, Evenkis dry the golden root strung on a thread and stored in bundles.

Commodification of Plants

In the area of the Baikal-Amur Mainline, there is competition between different groups of the population for the plants harvesting. Golden root and ianda are very popular with visitors as well. The *Gentiana algida* is now well known to the residents of Severobaikal'sk; sometimes it can be purchased at the local market. Since ianda is a rare plant, it is usually sold in small bunches at a high price.

In a market economy, valuable medicinal products become an object of accumulation and are used as an equivalent of exchange (sometimes ianda is exchanged for other medicines or animal fat). Earlier, according to the elderly residents of the village of Kholodnoe, the plants were collected by people for their own consumption. Now it is a reserve source of funds: stocks of herbs can be sold to villages where they are needed, and some pickers even have a network of regular customers (*Sirina, Fondalovskaya 20*). Informants recall that one of the physicians who worked in the district center purchased medicinal plants for himself and for resale to his patients. In 2007–2009 the equivalent of exchange, serving as a measure of the value of the ianda, was a half-liter bottle of vodka, later many began to prefer money as the price of the plant increased.

One of the residents of the village of Kholodnoe, a former BAM builder, said that the golden root was very popular among his fellow truck drivers (“magirus”). He added that “the people of Bam harvested everything near the Dovyren Mountain, and as a result the golden root disappeared”. People have repeatedly complained that there are fewer valuable medicinal plants because of the “Bamovtsy” in many places. It is important to note that the struggle for resources has always existed in this place. In the first half of the XX century Evenkis, Buryats and Russians competed in the berries picking (*Petri 1930: 68*). Now, on Northern Baikal, the interests of the Evenkis and visitors (bamovtsy), who store pine nuts and other gifts from the forests, collide.

Ianda is also perceived by the local people as a good gift. It can be presented to relatives or friends as a sign of respect. P.P. Lekareva said that hunters and reindeer herders usually provide old people with ianda free of charge. In her words, one has only to ask: “Do you have a little ianda?” (Iandikan bishin?) – and a visitor from the taiga should always share it. If one of the local dwellers goes to the forest in the second half of the summer, he is usually asked to bring ianda and golden root. Thus, plants are also an important element in maintaining social relations.

Hunting knowledge and skills: the idea of luck

The main occupations of the North Baikal Evenkis have always been hunting, reindeer husbandry, fishing, as well as (to a lesser extent) wild plants harvesting. It is necessary to emphasize the importance of hunting, since the very ability to hunt gave (and still gives) local people some advantages in other occupations. Primarily there are those where it is necessary to be able to observe and evaluate changes associated with the activities of multiple agents. Due to the high value of gentian and *rhodiola rosea*, their finding is a welcome, emotionally colored event. It is not enough just to know the places where these plants grow,

you still need to find and “get” them. In this sense, harvesting has a lot in common with hunting.

V.A. Tugolukov calls one of the chapters of his popular science book about Evenkis entitled “Pathfinders for the reindeer” as “Hunters for Fish” (Tugolukov 1969: 59-65). The author expressed an important idea: characteristic hunting traits (“hunter’s appearance”) may manifest themselves in a variety of spheres. Here is just one example: a hunting bow could serve as a fishing tool in former times for the Evenkis (Ibid: 59). Such use of material objects is typical for nomads – in fact, it is the implementation of the things polyfunctionality principle in practice (Golovnev et al. 2018: 5, 342).

A characteristic feature of the Evenki worldview is the idea of hunting luck (Brandišauskas 2017), it is luck that sets a special form of relations with the outside world, based on the active involvement of the subject in the events’ flow, the one far from passive and accidental opportunity to get any resource (Hamayon 2012). In other words, in this case, the idea of luck initiates an “innovative action projected into the future” (Hamayon 2010: 172). Hunting is associated with certain prohibitions that people try not to violate. For example, Evenkis believe that it is not good to boast about their bag, since luck may turn away from you. Moreover, from their point of view, luck accompanies a skillful hunter who ensures success by his actions. In the case of a search for medicinal plants, the same rule applies: the location of the desired one, as a rule, is revealed to an observant person who is well versed in the peculiarities of the local landscape.

In hunting, it is important to be able to move in a special way so as not to scare off prey. Plants, according to the North Baikal Evenkis, can also be “scared off”. If a person behaves inappropriately, making a lot of noise, they “won’t show up” – therefore, it will be difficult to detect them. Here not only the excitement that makes such a comparison possible should be noted, but in this context, the very Evenki attitude to production is important. Thus, N. Bird-David designated the “giving nature” principle (Bird-David 1990), supplemented by the need to show skill in obtaining a resource (Brandišauskas 2017), may be also applied to products not only hunting, but also harvesting. Thus, in the views of local people, plants have subjectivity, they can hide from a person looking for them. In order to make them appear, it is important not to lose your fortune.

The idea of luck is inextricably linked with the idea of the resource’s value. The value itself is not necessarily measured in some conventional units and is calculable. In the case of medicinal plants, it is determined by their usefulness and effectiveness. During the wild plants “campaign”, it is also important not to scare off luck, which people perceive as a kind of reward to the participant of the process. Therefore, Evenkis try to avoid direct conversations about their plans. As it was mentioned above, it is not customary to accurately name the places of harvesting, nor is it customary to suggest that a large number of plants will be found there. The idea of luck, thus, reflects the vision of events in dynamics, which, together with knowledge and skills, leads to a positive result – obtaining a resource.

Evenkis harvested plants mainly in summer, but, if necessary, they do it in winter (Namzalov et al. 2013: 206). In this process, you can see the implementation of the principle of multitasking, when one action simultaneously pursues several goals at once. According to A.P. Lekarev, which are confirmed by the data of A.A. Sirina and G. Fondal, as well as the author’s field materials, the campaign for ianda will coincide with the hunt for marmots-tarbagans (Sirina, Fondal 2006: 20). A similar practice exists among the reindeer herders of the “Uluki” obshchina in the mountain taiga – during their transitions they extract several different perennials at once, for example, ianda and golden root.

Local people try not to take too much, saving the resource for the future. The author of this article himself observed how some of the plants were left during the harvesting process. Such “voluntary restrictions” are another “hunting” element inherent for the local dwellers (Sirina 2008: 130). Evenkis restrict animal production even in cases where official quotas are actual (Anderson 2000: 138). For example, the Evenki hunters from Northern Baikal will not

kill a bear unnecessarily. Stories about greedy miners are used as an element of the mechanism of social control (Ventsel 2005: 269-299).

During the process of medical plants harvesting, people are guided by the ethics of minimalism (Simonova 2016; Golovnev et al. 2018). It reflects a special form of relationship with resources: this includes minimizing their consumption, controlling the use of energy resources, and “material minimalism” (Golovnev et al. 2018: 217) – the Evenkis take only the most necessary things with them on a hiking trip.

Walking in the taiga is a special way of perceiving the landscape, where skills and physical knowledge of the terrain are the most important components of space exploration (Ingold 2000). The participants of the process try to avoid heavy burdens – the path to the desired point passes through the mountain taiga and requires considerable effort. One of the main skills of a hunter – the ability to overcome long distances – involves the rational use of forces: an ergonomic gait allows a person to move in a certain rhythm and get tired less. Nikolay Malafeev, a resident of the village of Kholodnoe, who came to Northern Baikal from Ulan-Ude, said that a hunter should be able to walk in a special manner – without making unnecessary noise and without making needless movements. According to his words, he learned a lot from his mentors, the Evenkis, who could travel long distances, making rare stops.

A trip for medicinal herbs for local people is a special event, they prepare for it in advance. The usual “companions” of a person are *poniaga* (shoulder board with ropes for carrying loads)², a bag, a knife, a pot, matches, a gun and shells for it. A person usually takes a small amount of food: bread, sugar, tea, boiled meat. One of the informants-reindeer herders of the author of the article always took his “lucky” *poniaga* with him on a hike for medical plants – it was not only convenient for carrying loads, but also was associated with luck and created a positive mood. The man believed that the “happy” thing helps him in his search for *ianda*. (Sometimes *poniaga* serves as a kind of amulet – on one of these boards the author of this article saw a carved inscription “Save and Protect”.) The concept of a hunter and reindeer herder fulfills the role of a kind of exoskeleton, which allows to save energy on foot. One of the reindeer herders of the “Uluki” obshchina Georgy Arkad’evich Lekarev said: “I have a competitive *poniaga*. I found it as plywood in Pereval³ in 2002, so I travel with it!” The harvesting of medical plants can be carried out as a group or individually. The author of this article did not see any special rituals related to *ianda*. Nevertheless, it is known that during a halt, people necessarily treat the fire or, as they themselves say, “feed the master of the place”: they put small pieces of food into the fire. Alcohol can also be used for treats, if there is one. This is done in order not to lose your way, and also not to lose your luck.

Local people rarely take a break until the required number of plants is harvested. According to the prevailing ideas on Northern Baikal, rest before the completion of any labor operation, especially if there is a lot of grass, can affect luck. One of the informants told a comic story about a hunter who stopped to make tea right after he left the reindeer breeding base and crossed a nearby tributary of the Nomama River.

Thus, the harvesting of medicinal plants has a lot in common with hunting. The local dwellers “hunt” for wild plants, tracking them down, while trying to behave in a certain way so as not to lose their luck. After the plants are harvested, a break is usually taken, and then the extracted is carefully packed into a bag, which is attached to the rod. Tying various objects to this “Evenki backpack” is a special kind of art. The speed of movement depends on how possessions and loot are placed on it – nothing should create obstacles while walking. The concept of things and a person form an ergonomic whole that allows a person to save energy in motion. While hiking for plants, pickers, if they plan to return to these places, can leave tools and various inventory in the forest – this strategy makes it possible to move faster.

After returning, the local people prepare the harvested plants for drying: they are cleaned of dirt and tied into bundles. Then they are hung (usually for a week) on the crossbars under the ceiling of winter “zimov’ia” – small hunting log huts. As P.P. Lekareva said, drying *ianda*

on crossbars has been practiced by Evenkis for a long time, since the days when they “lived in yurts”⁴. People believe that sunlight reduces the effectiveness of medicinal plants and therefore they try to dry them in dark rooms – collected in bundles or spread out on paper on a flat surface, and the golden root strung on a thread.

Plants and human-animal relations

As it was already noted above, the ability to observe is very important for a hunter – but not only this one. In order to be successful, he must learn to think like an animal and understand the logic of the actions of the inhabitants of the taiga. Such a deep insight into the essence of the surrounding wildlife is characteristic of northern nomads-reindeer herders – they develop a special “reindeer thinking” (*Golovnev et al. 2018: 11*). The hunter mimetically gets used to the role of an animal in order to erase the boundary between himself and the prey during the hunt (*Willerslev 2007*).

Much of the Evenki knowledge about nature is the result of observing animals and processes occurring in nature: watching other living beings not only allows to get important information about the environment, but also “prompts” how to apply it in practice. According to the Evenki informants, people learned about the beneficial properties of many plants through observation of sick animals (*cf.: Dyrchikova 2014: 81*). So do the old-timers of the village of Kholodnoe. They note that different inhabitants of the taiga have their own food preferences. So, A.P. Lekarev during a conversation with the author of the article said that reindeer and elks eat certain types of plants. More than once I heard in Kholodnoe that elk is especially fond of ianda. Local residents claim that “elks and Manchurian deer are treated with reindeer moss (*Cladonia rangiferina*) in winter” growing on tree trunks. People use it for treating abdominal pain. P.P. Lekareva noted that dogs are sometimes treated with ianda. Evenkis believe that the “medicines” used by animals can be useful for humans.

For a long time, Evenkis have been treating not only themselves, but also their reindeer (*Tugolukov 1969: 98*); at the same time, in both cases, the same remedies were often used: ointments, tinctures, infusions, fumigation with juniper smoke (*senkire*) (people believe that this smoke is useful in the treatment of the respiratory tract, moreover, it is used in various rituals [*Namzalov et al. 2013: 206*])⁵.

Ianda was also used by Evenkis to treat animals. Therefore, P. Platonova said that earlier her broth was given to sick fawns (*Davydov 2013: 37*). People also gave the infusion to adult animals. V.A. Tugolukov writes that in the treatment of necrobacillosis (“hooves”), Evenkis washed the hooves of a reindeer in an infusion of a plant collected along the rocky banks of rivers and called as *marimchin* (*Tugolukov 1969: 98*). In the monograph of A.S. Shubin, published in 2007, noted that the North Baikal Evenkis roamed high in the mountains, in places rich in reindeer moss and hypericum (*erekte*), plants used for the treatment of reindeer (*Shubin 2007: 169*). Evenkis drank an infusion of hypericum themselves – as treatment from coughing (*Ibid.*).

Plants, which play the role of an important link between humans and nature, are embedded in the broad context of social interactions of people not only with each other, but also with animals and with the surrounding landscape. The practices of using local flora in various spheres of people’s lives are largely based on observing the use of plants by “our smaller brothers”.

* * *

The Evenki knowledge about medicinal plants is inseparable from the information about the changes taking place in the environment, and is harmoniously combined with the vital skills and abilities formed by generations of this nomadic people. The universality of medicines in conditions of relative autonomy and remoteness can be considered as a medical technology. Nomadic life, characterized by a shortage of any resources, required the search and use of

effective therapeutic drugs to maintain health. Therefore, it was very important to find and store medicinal plants of a wide spectrum of action.

The ability to promptly provide medical care allowed local people to be less dependent on the external environment, and the nomadic lifestyle contributed to the acquisition of knowledge about medicinal plants and their properties and the formation of the practice of their use.

Harvesting plants, as it was shown above, have similar features to hunting, and people engaged in it are guided by the same ethical principles as hunters. Often local people combine this activity with other ones. The plants themselves are an important element of the exchange relations that connect the local community and unite people who live permanently in the village, and hunters and reindeer herders who stay for long periods outside. Local dwellers use medicinal wild plants along with the means of official medicine, and doctors often supplement treatment with “the Evenki medicines”.

A good knowledge of the territory of residence and nomadism allowed Evenkis to find healing remedies around themselves – in fact, the landscape itself can be described as “healing”, capable of healing (*Anderson 2011*). Since the necessary resources should be sought and extracted in different places, it is not possible to do for one person. If necessary, local people transmit information to each other about the availability of traditional medicines and cooperate to provide assistance. Thus, “the Evenki medicines” are also important means of integrating the local community.

Notes

¹ The author of the article defines the plant, called ianda by local people, as gentian (*Gentiana algida*). It is quite common in the region when a number of plants are called the same way. Wild rosemary may be an example.

² Local people call the poniaga the “Evenki backpack”. Previously, they made it from a single piece of wood and even straps. Modern poniagas are made from improvised means: plywood, metal pipes, boards.

³ An abandoned geological settlement. Local dwellers use parts of old buildings and machinery as materials for repairs, for making new things, and also as fuel.

⁴ Local people call conical dwellings yurts, avoiding the word “raw-hide tent”, which they associate with the disease (plague) (*in Russian language these words – “raw-hide tent” and “plague” – sound similar – the translator’s comment*).

⁵ Nowadays juniper smoke is used not only for reindeer, but also vehicles. For example, before a trip to the taiga, the Evenkis from the “Uluki” obshchina sometimes fumigate the “Ural” truck.

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