

## ANIMAL FOODS OF THE INUIT IN NUNAVUT

The Inuit of the land area of Nunavut has three districts: Kivalliq, Kitikmeot and Baffin Island. This article will talk about the animals found in these three districts. Focusing on the animals the Inuit eat for food. The animals named have been eaten by the Inuit for thousands of years and these same animals are eaten today in these areas. Peary (rare) and Barrenland caribou (common). There are four species of seals; Bearded seal, Hooded seal, Harbour seal, Ring seals and Harp seal. There are many kinds of fish; char, trout, land lock char, white fish (two kinds), cod, sculpin and with the climate change, the salmon are now in the arctic oceans. There are whales of various kinds; beluga, narwhal, bowhead and again, with the climate change, the orcas are now common in the arctic oceans also. Other animals eaten by the Inuit are; polar bear, rabbits, ptarmigan and eider ducks.

The two kinds of caribou in Nunavut, Peary and Barrenland are hunted by the hunters. The hunters only take what is needed, hunter might get 2 or 3 caribou to last a winter. Meat is cut into sections, for example, the legs, rump, shoulders, tenderloin, tongue, ribs and the head, then the internal organs such as the heart, stomach, kidneys. Also, the hunter might catch more than 3 caribou over a period of time during the Spring, Summer and Fall seasons. When the family is out on the land camping during the Spring and Summer, they make dry caribou meat which is placed on rocks or a rope line to dry slowly by the sun. The dried meat is a valuable source of protein during the winter months. The meat is dried so it will not spoil nor does the meat have to be in a freezer. Each hamlet has a community freezer, the meat is stored in these freezers for winter meat. The freezer is a building, each person who wishes to use the freezer is assigned a compartment with their own padlock. The freezer is provided by the municipal government at no charge. The Inuit also build a shed next to their house and they store their fall season catch in their sheds for winter food.

The parts of the caribou that are used for sharing or a household family food are; shoulders, ribs, rump, heart, kidneys, brain, liver and the legs. The delicacies are the tenderloin, head, tongue, eyes, stomach and leg marrow. The delicacies are usually saved for the children.

The most common seals caught is the ring seal. Right after being caught, the skin is removed with the blubber attached to the seal, then the meat is divided into sections. The meat is used for eating; either fresh raw, frozen or cooked. The dried seal meat becomes very chewy as it dries bloody. It is delicious and nutritious. The guts are divided; heart, liver, kidneys, intestines and the stomach (the stomach is emptied of the digested food). The taste of the ring seal is fresh salt-like taste, not strong. The hunters eat the liver soon as the seal is caught, a piece of liver and a piece of blubber. This is very nutritious, and the hunters follow it up with hot tea. This tradition is years and years old and still practiced today, passed on from one generation to the next.

The bearded seal is next most common. The bearded seal is huge. The meat of the bearded seal is very strong tasting, due to their different diet than ring seal. Mostly the adults eat the meat, either left to marinade buried under the gravel. It can be eaten frozen or cooked in a pot. The children don't often favour bearded seal meat.

Of the most popular food fish is the char. The meat of the char fish is red as they feed on tiny shrimp which are found along the shores of the sea ocean. The char can be dried during the

summer months and dried by the sun slowly. The char is eaten fresh raw, boiled and frozen. The children eat a lot of frozen char fish, more so than any other way.

The heads of the char fish are boiled, and the Inuit get together at the end of the day and eat them and tells stories or of the day's events. Children love the char fish heads when they have been boiled, children often eat the fisheyes when the fish is taken off the nets. The roe and the liver are a delicacy food. The stomach of the fishes is cleaned of digested food and then boiled together in bunches. This is popular among women, after a hard day's work of cleaning fish, they get together at the end of the day to eat together.

The trout fish is very common. The trout are plentiful in the many lakes in Nunavut. These are made into dry fish during the summer for winter food. They are eaten raw, frozen, cooked or dried. They are a lean fish so when they are dried, there is no fat that can go rancid being stored for the winter food. The roe, stomach, belly and the head are also delicacies. Quite often when out fishing on the ice during the Spring, the children eat the eyes as they are best when they are fresh.

Cod fish is popular fish food also with more traditional families, eating it frozen is most popular way to eat them. The liver and the roe are also delicacies for the fisher-people. Also, the cod is used to feed the husky dogs.

The white fish also a delicacy food. It is delicious to eat when frozen but it can also be dried or cooked.

The landlocked char is plentiful in the lakes. These fish are red fleshed and small in size and very lean, there is no fat on them. These are made into dry fish for winter food, kept in shed and kept dried frozen. These small fish are very delicious as dried fish.

The beluga whales are most common in the arctic oceans. The skin of any whales are prized for food. The skin is always eaten, every part of the skin. The Inuit also boil them and eat them, followed by tea and bannock. The narwhals are not as common all over Nunavut, some areas have an abundance of them. The skin is black with white dots and eaten and cooked the same way as the beluga skin. The meat of the whales can also be dried, it's chewy, dark meat and delicious as dried. In all of Nunavut, the hunters are allowed one harvesting of bowhead, one harvest of a bowhead in all of Nunavut. The Nunavut Wildlife Management Board decides which community is allowed to hunt a bowhead. The skin is shared with all the communities in Nunavut.

Other wildlife are polar bear. The meat has to be cooked well. It cannot be eaten raw. The liver is toxic due to a very high content of vitamin A.

Some Inuit go hunting for the rabbits, it is cut into parts and boiled. Ptarmigan is also a very delicious meat, it is boiled and eaten. Eider ducks are hunted in early Spring, it is boiled and eaten. Eider ducks are not hunted in late Spring or Summer, they are left alone to nest. White swans also go to the arctic to nest, however, from my own experience, they are an attraction to see from a far distance as to not disturb them.

The Inuit still depend on land foods to stay healthy and the fresh animal catches. The population of larger animals are well monitored by the local Hunter's and Trappers Organizations in conjunction with Nunavut Wildlife Management Board. In some parts of Nunavut, there are so many lakes with trout fish and land locked char, the populations are not really monitored as they

remain in abundance as they feed from springtime thaw rivers that flow into the lakes. The younger generation are taught about respecting animals from the smallest to large animals. With monitoring of wildlife by the traditional knowledge keepers and by working with the local Hunter's and Trappers, the Inuit can live healthy for generations to come.