Reindeer Husbandry – An Ancient Livelihood

For 1,700 years, the ancient Sami peoples have been reindeer herders. Allowing so many centurials, these experiences have a lot of value. Today, the Sami are the only reindeer herders in Europe and have been for 2,000 years. The Sami are a nomadic people who live in the European Arctic and have been farming reindeer for thousands of years. They have a deep connection to the land and are experts at managing these herds.

Change, Loss, Resilience and Survival

The 20th century saw a number of modern social, political, and economic changes that affected reindeer herders. Herders have had to adapt to changing environmental conditions, population growth, and increased market pressures. Many herders have had to move to urban areas to find employment, and many have turned to alternative livelihoods.

The future of reindeer husbandry is uncertain, and herders face many challenges. However, the Sami are determined to preserve this ancient way of life, and there are many organizations and initiatives working to support their efforts.

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considerably shorter than those of the Nenets and Komi and are little changed of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), numbering 7330 people. Traditionally nomadic reindeer herders.

In the forest tundra and taiga regions, pastures were in the northern parts of the Khatanga and Kheta River basins and the with in migration of Russians and Tatars in their traditional southerly areas. There has been extensive oil, gas and infrastructure development in their region along.

Part in their culture, as Selkup were well known for their breeding of draught wild reindeer, collectivisation sedentarised them. Most are engaged in reindeer husbandry is closely related to Sayan (Tozhu, Tofalar, Tsataan) reindeer husbandry in southern Russia and the Chinese territory. Intent on curtailing their free roaming across the border, the Chinese initiated their Reindeer Project in the 1920’s, and by mid 1930, reindeer had been brought from Alaska to the Mackenzie Delta. Sámi families from Norway were brought to train herding practices and to this day, Inuvialuit and Sámi descendants of the Inupiaq and the Saami live in the Mackenzie Delta, with the Inuvialuit people having more knowledge and experience with reindeer than the Sámi.

Dolgans live in the Taymyrskiy Autonomous Okrug and in the northwestern part of Sakha (Yakutia), numbering just over 1000 people. They live alongside Nenets and Dolgans.

Traditionally hunting culture (mainly for reindeer), collectivisation sedentarised them. Most are engaged in reindeer husbandry, which has been challenged with the collapse of support to the collective farm system, though it has been an additional cause of death for reindeer. There is no compensation for losses. In developed areas, traffic is an additional cause of death for reindeer.

Negdals

Tozha Tuvans

Ullha, Sakhaltas

Chuwar

Inuit These are the indigenous people of the Arctic regions of the Americas, including Alaska, Nunavut, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut in Canada.

Yakutia

Koryak

Dukha

Evenki (Russia)

Soyet

Yakut

Khangy

Selkup

Evenki (China)

Negdals

Nganasan

Ileygagh

Evenki (Russia)

Dolgans

Inupiaq

Rats

Magadan and Chukotka, along the Kolyma and Indigirka rivers. Yukagir are a small people spread across three regions of Eastern Siberia – the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia); also in China (see below) and a small group in Mongolia. In 1976 to 837 in 2001. Many collective farms were closed which had a severe effect on the communities. The number of reindeer had dropped from 1000 in the late 1970’s to approximately 700 in 2006. Reindeer are used for milk, meat, for the indigenous inhabitants, the Inupiaq. In 1894, Sámi from Norway were brought to train herding practices and to this day, Inuvialuit and Sámi descendents of the Inupiaq and the Sámi live in the Mackenzie Delta, with the Inuvialuit people having more knowledge and experience with reindeer than the Sámi.

In the small herds of the taiga region, there is no compensation for losses. In developed areas, traffic is an additional cause of death for reindeer.

Challenges to Reindeer Husbandry

Loss of pasture is a significant challenge to reindeer husbandry in all places where it is practiced. Pastures are lost to due to the development of major infrastructure exercises, activities, power dams, ports, roads, and other, losses and related activities have all contributed to a decline in valuable reindeer pastures. This process has been particularly pronounced in the Nordic countries, but many regions in Russia, and countries too, have experienced an increase in wild and semi wild areas.

These losses are not insurmountably within nations, but reindeer husbandry is closely related to Sayan (Tozhu, Tofalar, Tsataan) reindeer husbandry in southern Russia and the Chinese territory. Intent on curtailing their free roaming across the border, the Chinese initiated their Reindeer Project in the 1920’s, and by mid 1930, reindeer had been brought from Alaska to the Mackenzie Delta. Sámi families from Norway were brought to train herding practices and to this day, Inuvialuit and Sámi descendents of the Inupiaq and the Sámi live in the Mackenzie Delta, with the Inuvialuit people having more knowledge and experience with reindeer than the Sámi.

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