

Ethnobotany in Nunatsiavut: understanding berry picking through biological and cultural perspectives

Introduction

Ethnobotany is the study of culturally significant plants. Of the many plants used by Inuit, berries play a significant role in the diets and cultures of Subarctic and Arctic communities. We partnered with the coastal communities of Postville, Hopedale, and Rigolet (Nunatsiavut), to document overall plant use, with an emphasis on berries.

Justification

We want to understand the link between berries and culture in Nunatsiavut as a means to identify and prevent cultural erosion.

Methodology and Timeline

Community consultations: February 2017



Interviews and guided tours: June 2017



Community workshops in Hopedale and Postville: September 2017



Presenting findings to community: Spring 2018

Results: Taxa and Frequency

Of 67 taxa reported, 34 were species and 26 were genera. Seventeen (17) of all taxa were berries (Fig. 1). Eighteen (18) species were common to all communities, nine (9) of which were berry species (Fig. 2). Ten (10) genera were common to all communities, two (2) of which were berries (Fig. 3). The top four most reported taxa were berry taxa (Fig. 4).

Figures

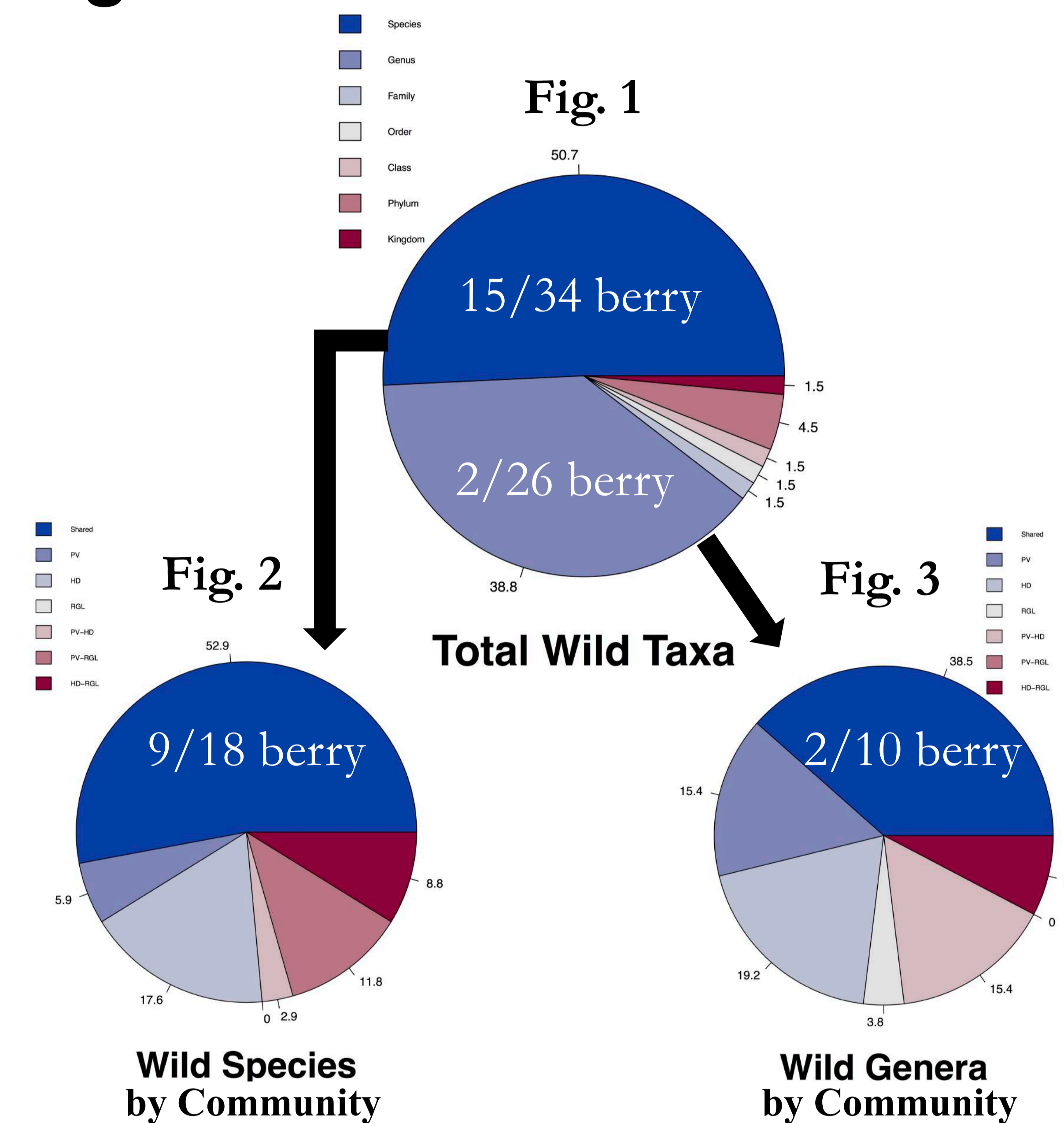


Fig. 4: Most frequently reported taxa:



Results: Cultural Significance

Berries and culture are inseparable. There are threats to berries and berry access, and therefore threats to local culture.

- **Food:** jam, baked goods, fresh, smoking fish
- **Medicine:** scurvy, encouraging appetite
- **Crafting:** dying grass for weaving

Language reservoir: 25/53 (47%) of responses in Inuttut were about berries

Supporting traditional values: living off the land, sharing with others, taking only what is needed

Threats to berries: hotter/drier weather, road dust, skidoo damage

Threats to berry access: distance, cost of gas, aging, being a non-beneficiary, garbage, creation of a berry market, not knowing where to go

Conclusion

Berries are a cultural reservoir in Nunatsiavut. Taking measures to mitigate threats to berries and providing access to berries could both protect berries and sustain local activities, values, and culture.

Acknowledgements

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