



Fight to end guga hunt intensifies as NatureScot receives 2026 licence application

Description

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Gannets in flight NatureScot spending on guga hunt

Pressure is mounting on [Scotland's](#) nature agency after it confirmed a new licence application has been received for the guga hunt this year.

[The guga hunt involves the annual killing of gannet seabird chicks in the Outer Hebrides](#) Now the controversial practice is once again under consideration for 2026 after an application was submitted by the 10-man hunting team based in Ness on the Isle of Lewis.

The hunt, which takes place on [the remote island of Sula Sgeir](#) has been carried out for centuries and was once used for food during harsh winters. However, campaigners argue that young gannet flesh is [now considered a delicacy](#) something they say is unnecessary, cruel, and increasingly incompatible with modern values.

The guga hunt has become one of Scotland's most controversial wildlife issues, with [a petition launched by wildlife photographer Rachel Bigsby calling for an end to the practice](#) becoming the largest submitted to the last Scottish parliament.

Guga hunt allowed due to legal loophole

Killing wild birds is normally illegal, but the guga hunt continues under a specific exemption in the Wildlife and Countryside Act. The issue is now set to return to the Scottish parliament, where campaigners hope the exemption will finally be removed and the hunt outlawed.

High-profile protests against the hunt have continued to grow, including a rooftop occupation of NatureScot's headquarters, where anti-guga hunt activists remained for two nights demanding an end to the licensing of the hunt.

[Protect the Wild](#) one of the leading organisations campaigning against the hunt, said its own [petition calling on NatureScot to stop licensing the hunt has attracted more than 183,000 signatures](#) making it the largest petition ever received by Scotland's nature agency.

The group is calling on NatureScot to refuse this year's licence. It says the agency is now the only thing standing between the colony and [another year of "senseless slaughter"](#).

Devon Docherty, Scottish campaigns manager at Protect the Wild, said:

The guga hunt is one of the cruellest and most ecologically reckless wildlife practices left in Scotland and NatureScot is the only thing standing between these birds and another year of senseless slaughter.

Every year, defenceless gannet chicks are beaten to death on a supposedly protected island all for an outdated delicacy that nobody needs.

According to new polling [conducted](#) by Protect the Wild, 77% of Scots who expressed a view said they support banning the guga hunt.

Docherty added:

The science is unambiguous: this is the only Special Protection Area for gannets in decline, and the hunt itself is suppressing the colony's recovery. The vast majority of the public are against this practice and want to see wildlife being respected.

NatureScot has a choice to make: keep signing off a hunt that survives on tradition alone, or do the job its name implies and protect the nature in its care.

NatureScot said it will now meet with key stakeholders before bringing a final decision on the licence application to its board.

Featured image via John Ranson for the Canary

By [The Canary](#)

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