



Western Isles MP attacks guga hunt campaigners

Description

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Composite image with gannets in background. In foreground, guga hunt protester Rob Pownall, in gannet

Torcuil Crichton MP, the Labour MP for the Western Isles, has hit back at campaigners opposing the [annual guga hunt](#)

He accused protesters of “attention-seeking behaviour” and “virtue-signalling”. In response, campaigners accused Crichton of “dismissive and belittling rhetoric”, saying he’s:

lost sight of the views of his constituents.

The spat comes as Scotland’s nature agency received a licence application for the guga hunt this year. The 10 man hunting team based in Ness, Isle of Lewis is seeking NatureScot’s permission to [kill gannet chicks on the island of Sula Sgeir](#). The birds, [still too young to fly](#), are removed from their nests, slaughtered and brought back to Lewis to be [eaten as a traditional delicacy](#)

Supporters say it’s an important cultural tradition, but campaigners say it’s cruel and needs banning.

Former Gaelic broadcaster Crichton poked fun at campaigners’ language skills, saying:

Until now I have hesitated to comment on what its own organisers pronounce as the campaign to “Abolish the goo-ga hunt”. It struck me as another one of these boring examples of attention-seeking behaviour, enabled by social media and fuelled by a lack of real purpose in life.

The “goo-ga” campaign does fall into the virtue-signalling camp of activism and to prove their commitment someone undertook a sweat-drenched election campaign in a

penguin suit (he didn't look anything like a gannet) and was willing to put others at risk by climbing onto the roof of a public building.

The MP, who won election to the Na h-Eileanan an Iar constituency in 2024, added:

The guga harvest is an essential part of the history, culture and identity of Ness. It is conducted with due reverence to sustainability and importantly to what it means to the continuation of the living tradition of the islands.

Crichton's comments referenced Protect the Wild's recent Scottish parliament election campaign, during which the organisation's founder [stood as a giant gannet to protest the guga hunt](#). Responding, Devon Docherty, Scottish campaigns manager at Protect the Wild, said:

We suggest Mr Crichton might want to take a trip to Specsavers if he thought our tailor-made gannet costume was a penguin.

Unfortunately, a man so **default watermark** down his nose at wildlife campaigners appears to have lost sight of the people he was elected to represent, many of whom oppose the guga hunt, but are afraid to speak out because of the kind of dismissive, belittling rhetoric his statement exemplifies.

Docherty said the MP's comments were out of step with the Labour Party's commitments to animal welfare and their recent action to end fox hunting:

He would also be wise to look at the history and stated values of his own party. After all, defenders of fox hunting relied on exactly the same arguments used in favour of the guga hunt: tradition, culture, heritage and rural identity. Labour rightly rejected them then. Why accept them now?

She added:

The guga hunt is indeed part of the history of Ness. But that is exactly where it should stay, because the mass slaughter of native wildlife clearly has no place in Scotland's future.

Protect the Wild's [petition urging NatureScot to reject the Guga hunt licence has surpassed 200,000 signatures](#). The group believes it's the largest petition the agency has ever received. NatureScot says it will assess the application using the most recent scientific evidence, before its board makes the final decision.

Featured image via the Canary / Protect the Wild / [Jeff J Mitchell](#) 

By [The Canary](#)

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