

Controversial Swedish wolf hunt ends, one escapes

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A wolf stands in the snow at its zoo enclosure in western Germany. Sweden's controversial wolf hunt -- which has sparked widespread criticism from environmentalists and legal action from the European Commission -- has ended with hunters failing to cull one of the 20 animals in the quota.

Sweden's controversial wolf hunt, which has sparked widespread criticism from environmentalists and legal action from the European Commission, ended with hunters failing to cull one of the 20 animals in the quota, officials said Wednesday.

"The hunt is now over in all regions," Anneli Nivren of the Swedish [Environmental Protection Agency](#) told AFP, adding one wolf had escaped the hunters.

This year's hunt started on January 15 and ended Tuesday, during which time hunters were permitted to shoot 20 wolves across six regions.

But by an hour after sundown Tuesday when the hunting season ended, only 19 animals had been culled.

"It's too bad. We would have have gladly taken it," the head of the hunters' association in the central Swedish region of Vaestmanland told the TT news agency late Tuesday.

Sweden argues the hunt, which was reopened last year after a 46-year hiatus, allows it to strengthen the gene pool of its largely inbred wolf population, insisting it will import wolves from Finland and Russia to replace the killed animals.

The hunt also enjoys support in rural Sweden, where the small wolf stock has grown over the past three decades and sheep and [reindeer](#) have increasingly come under attack.

The Swedish parliament decided in 2009 to keep [wolf](#) numbers at 210 animals, spread out in 20 packs, with 20 new pups per year.

In January, the European Commission launched legal action against Sweden for allowing the hunt of a protected species.



A hunter walks as he attends a wolf hunt near Kristinehamn. Sweden's controversial wolf hunt -- which has sparked widespread criticism from environmentalists and legal action from the European Commission -- has ended with hunters failing to cull one of the 20 animals in the quota.

It decided to open a formal infringement procedure, which could lead to a case before the European Court of Justice, which can impose hefty fines on EU states that violate the bloc's rules.

According to the Commission, some 6,700 hunters took part in this year's hunt.

The hunt is also controversial in Sweden. Earlier this month, protestors marched through central Stockholm carrying 20 coffins to symbolise the number of wolves in this year's hunting quota, and nearly 8,000 people sent letters to Brussels to protest the hunt through a Swedish environmental group's website.

Last week, former screen idol turned animal rights campaigner Brigitte Bardot also blasted the hunt as "retrograde" in a letter to Environment Minister Andreas Carlgren and urged a halt to the cull.

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