

Scientists for Antarctic to study the 'Krill'

Defence Reporter

THE naval hydrographic survey ship, SAS Protea, steamed out of Cape Town harbour yesterday on a 10-week cruise to an Antarctic "aircraft carrier" to study a protein-rich sea-animal, 4 cm long and known internationally by the Norwegian name of "krill".

The "aircraft carrier", it was explained yesterday by expedition leader Dr D L Cram, of the Division of Sea Fisheries, is the Antarctic's South Georgia Island, where millions of krill-eating seabirds nest every year.

Using a SAAF helicopter, the Protea expedition's seven scientists — six South Africans and a German — will make aerial surveys of the birds as part of an international scientific programme called "Project Biomass", which is to study all the living resources of Antarctica.

They will do this, he said, because "if the krill population of the southern oceans) is

reduced, we think the birds will notice it first".

Dr Cram explained at a press conference on board SAS Protea yesterday that a number of countries, including Russia, West Germany, Poland, Japan and Taiwan had launched pilot schemes aimed at exploiting the southern oceans' supply of krill, a special type of crustacean which is a source of high-quality protein.

Dr Cram said krill's nutritional value could be used in various ways: "You can freeze it as is, and make it into soups and stews, pulp it and market the oil and protein as paste, or turn it into a powder. The Protea will receive extensive scientific co-operation from various other signatories of the Antarctic Treaty through the International Council of Scientific Unions. Among other things an American space satellite will be specially programmed to take photographs of South Georgia Island for the Protea expedition.



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