

Island culling after 4 cats became 3 500

By JOHN YELD
Environment Reporter

THE "unpleasant" task of eliminating 3 500 cats from Marion Island should remind people of the importance of animal sterilisation programmes, according to the SPCA and Animal Welfare Society.

Their joint statement follows the departure of a new cat hunting team aboard the SA Agulhas last week to take over the job of shooting cats on the island which is still relatively pristine in ecological terms.

The two organisations said they wanted to reassure concerned people an inquiry had been held into the proposed culling of the cats which have been killing an estimated half-a-million seabirds a year.

SAME SEX

Two cats of the same sex were introduced in 1948 by staff of the station, then run by the Department of Transport, to help eliminate mice.

The two did such a good job another two — supposedly of the same sex — were brought in to help, the joint statement said.

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"Unfortunately an error was made and the cats began breeding so rapidly they were turned out of the station.

"We've been told scientific estimates were these cats, now wild and fierce, were killing 500 000 birds each year, bringing them to the point of extinction."

The organisations said something "drastic" had to be done, and for the past two seasons marksmen had reduced the cat population to between 20 and 60 animals.

Shooting was the best method in the rugged, mountainous terrain and they had been assured the marksmen were properly trained.

"It's a very nasty situation calling for a final concerted effort to eliminate the cats once and for all.

"We want to remind the public this unpleasantness is what can happen when our joint exhortations to sterilise animals are ignored.

"Please, public, take this lesson to heart — 3 500 cats have had to be shot because four weren't sterilised."