

# Major Antarctic study to begin next year

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Sixty-two Australian researchers will spend 10 weeks next year sampling and surveying the Southern Ocean, which surrounds Antarctica.

The scientists -- from the Australian Antarctic Division and the Antarctic Climate and Ecosystems Cooperative Research Center -- will, among other tasks, estimate the number of krill in the ocean and compare visual observations of whales with acoustical observations, said study leader Steve Nicol.

"So when all this is finished we will have a third of the Antarctic surveyed and we'll have a complete picture of everything from the oceanography right the way through to the whales, (giving) us a really good idea of how the entire system works," he told the Australian Broadcasting Corp.

Krill researcher Dr. Toby Jarvis said the tiny shrimp-like crustaceans are a vital food source in the Southern Ocean, but the number and distribution of krill is not known.

An echo sounder trailed behind the expedition's ship will be used to collect information, rather than towing a net.

"Krill provide sound echoes and it gives us a way of measuring with a much higher degree of resolution, where these krill are and how many there are," Jarvis told the ABC.

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