



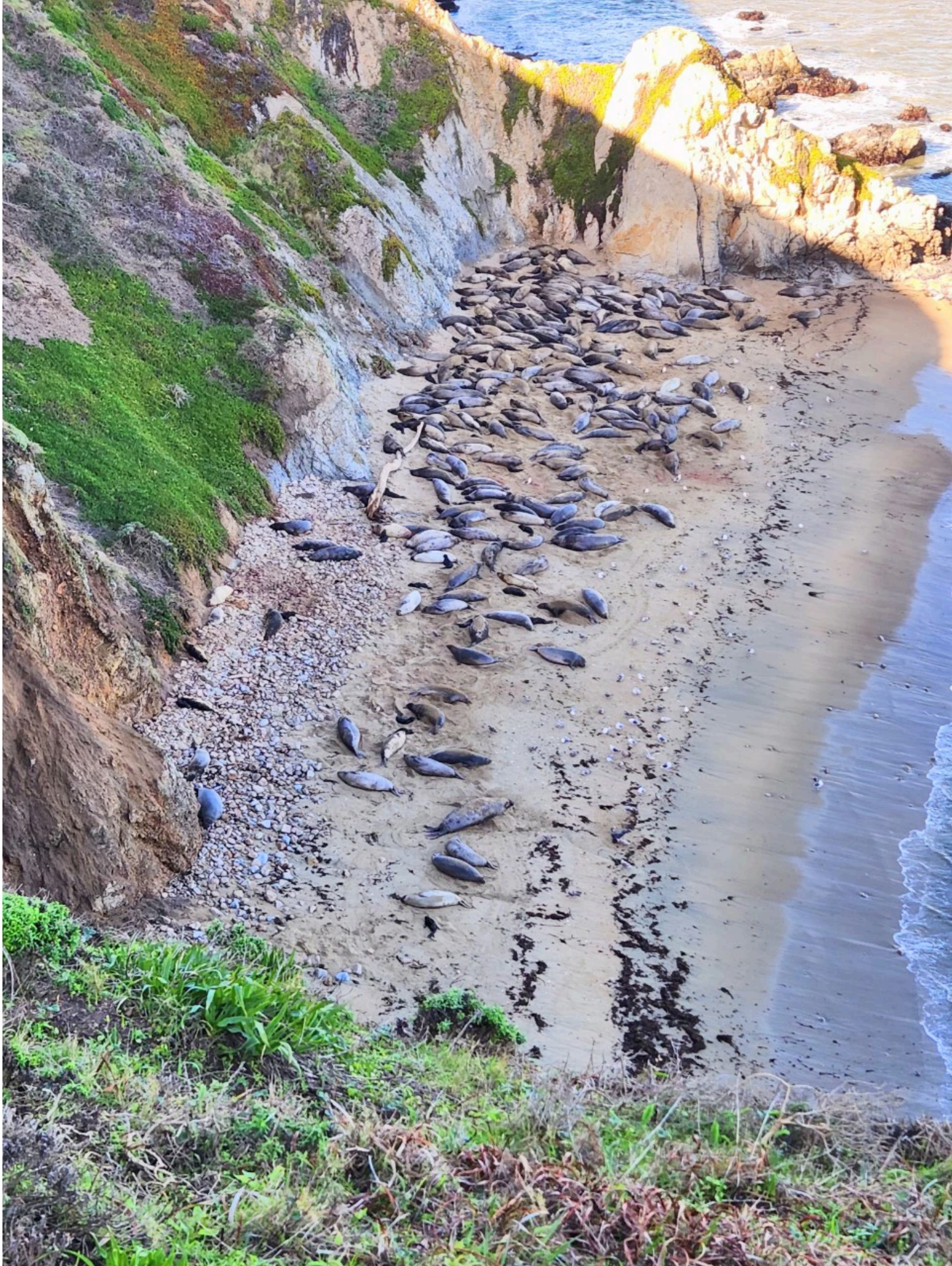
ARTICLE

Elephant Seal Monitoring Season Summary: Winter 2022-2023

Point Reyes National Seashore (<https://www.nps.gov/pore/>)

Season Highlights

- The beach in front of The Ken Patrick Visitor Center (KPVC) once again became an [elephant seal](https://cms.nps.gov/rlc/pacificcoast/elephant-seals.htm) (<https://cms.nps.gov/rlc/pacificcoast/elephant-seals.htm>) haul out site this breeding season, likely in response to the intense storms in early January.
 - Similar behavior was observed in 2019 and 2021
- These storms caused the peak of pupping to lag about a week behind last year's peak.
- This year's oldest female and male whose tags were resighted:
 - Pink tag K847: 17-year-old female
 - Pink tag N665: 11-year-old male
- As of March 17th, NPS researchers have tagged over 420 weaned pups!
- This season NPS researchers also supported projects out of UC Santa Cruz, Sonoma State University, and The Marine Mammal Center.



Gus's cove two weeks before the peak of pupping.
NPS / Sarah Allen, NMFS Permit No. 21425

Visitor's View

Park staff normally use deterrence methods to prevent females from pupping on the beach in front of KPVC, but given the intensity of this season's storms staff decided to let the harems shelter in place, with efforts focused on keeping the parking lot as seal free as possible. Consequently, Drakes Beach was closed completely this breeding season, but visitors had great views of the newborn pups, nursing cows, and males of all age classes. Turns out the invasive ice plant (*Carpobrotus edulis*) makes a wonderful nursery! Near the season peak, 77 females were present and 62 pups were nursing.



Females lay on the ice plant with their newborn pups.

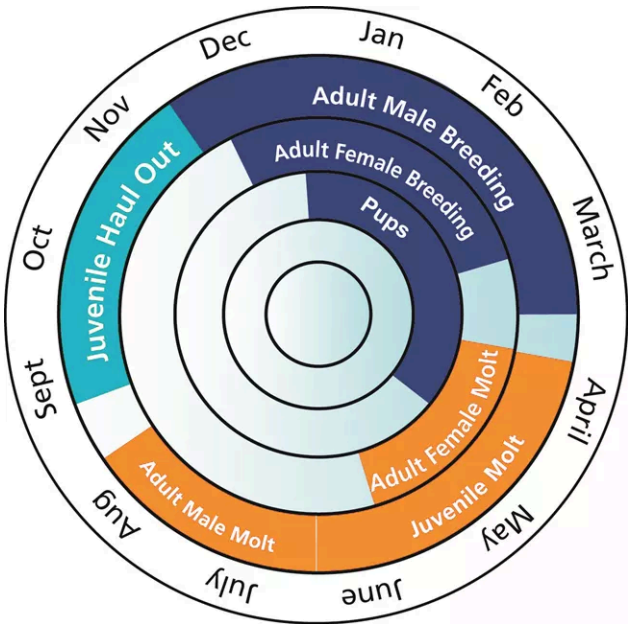
NPS / Matt Lau, NMFS Permit No. 21425



Panoramic view from the elephant seal viewing area, featuring NPS Marine Ecologist Sarah Codde on the far right.
NPS / Matt Lau, NMFS Permit No. 21425

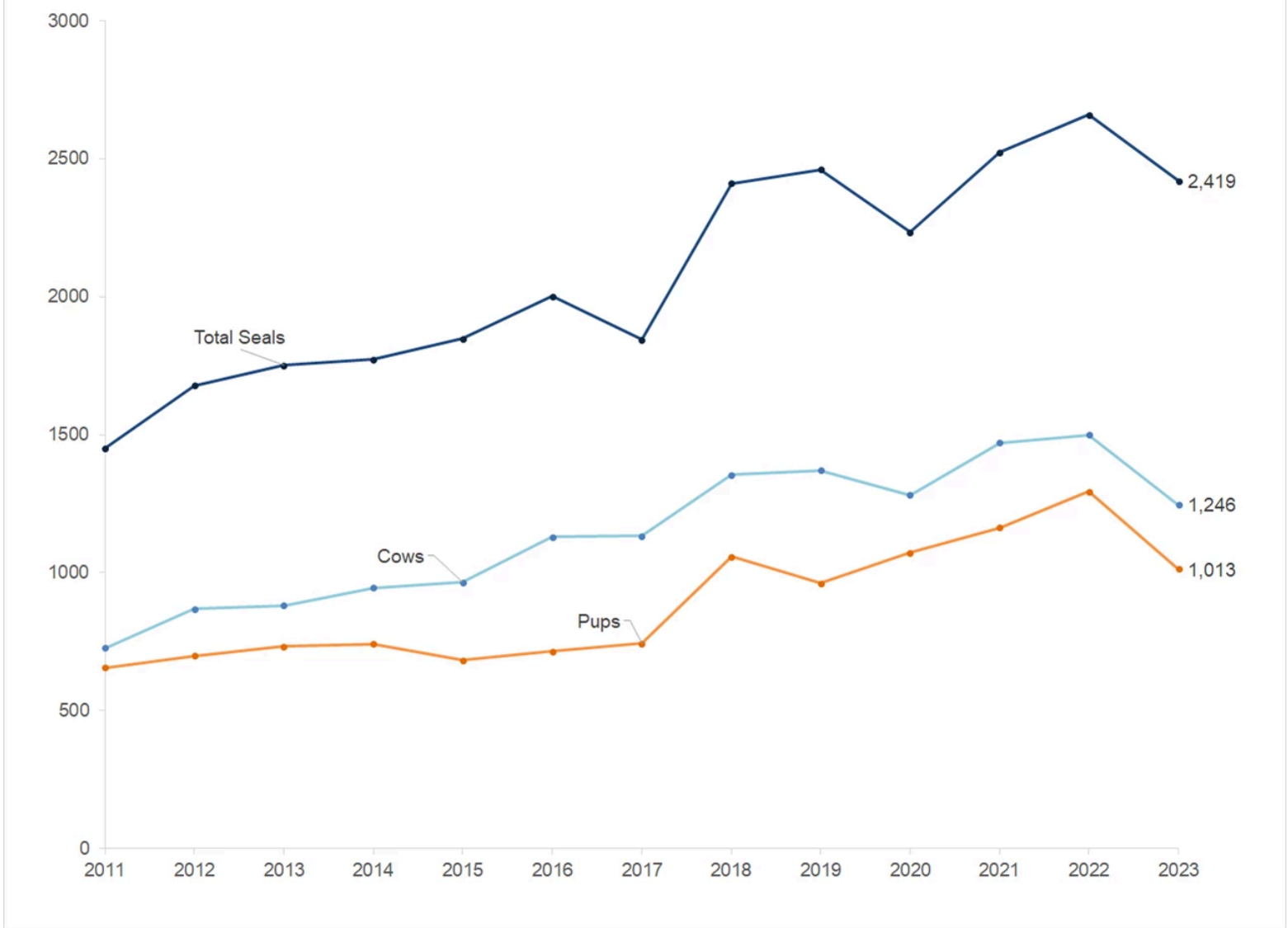
Elephant Seal Annual Cycle

While the breeding season is the most populous and active time for elephant seals at Point Reyes, seals can be seen in the park all year round! Elephant seals come on shore twice a year: adults come to breed and then to molt, while juvenile seals come onshore for the “juvenile haul out” and to molt. Some individuals may look particularly rough and shaggy during the molt, but after a few weeks their coats will grow in full and healthy!



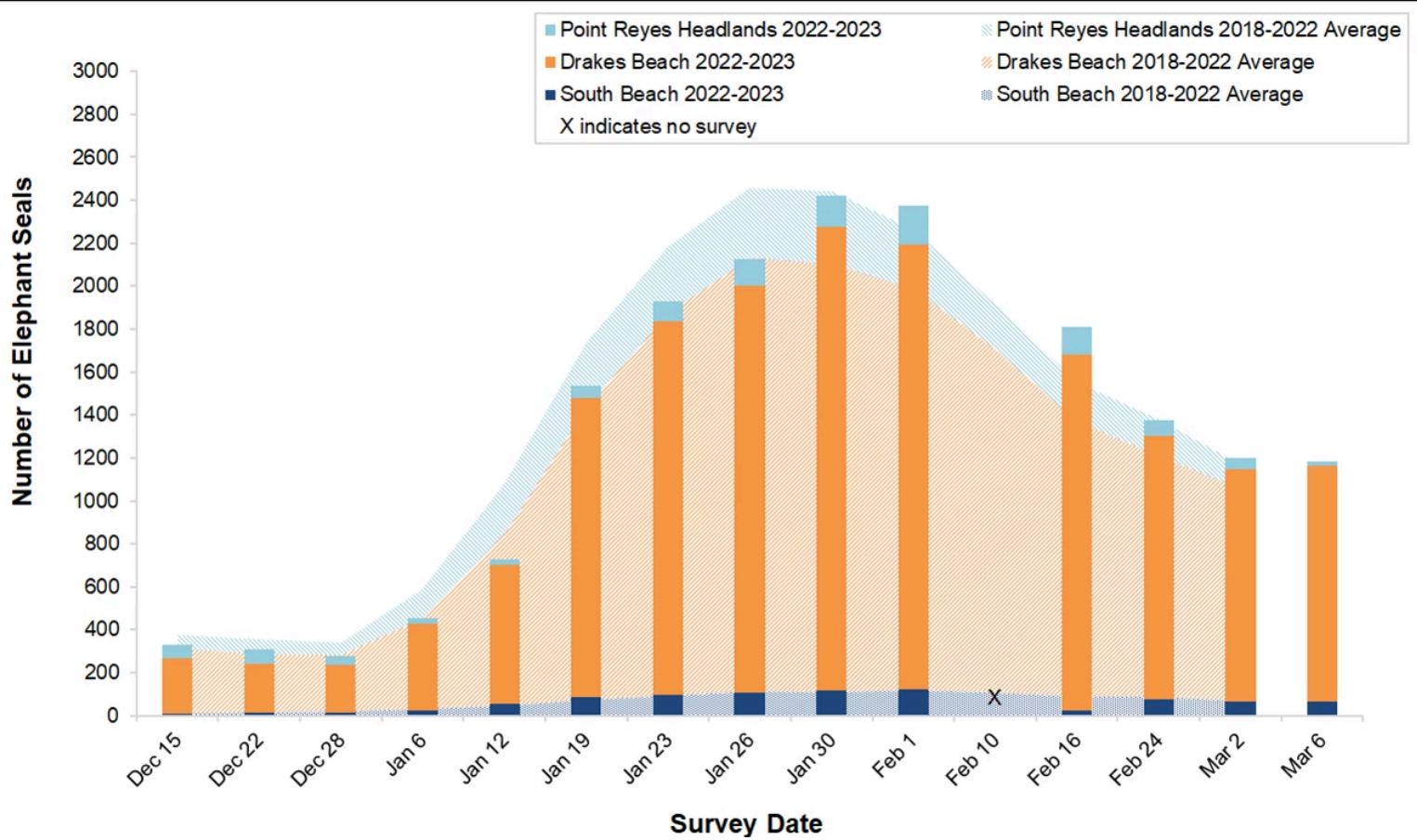
By the Numbers

Elephant Seal Breeding Season Peaks, 2011-2023 (from direct ground counts)



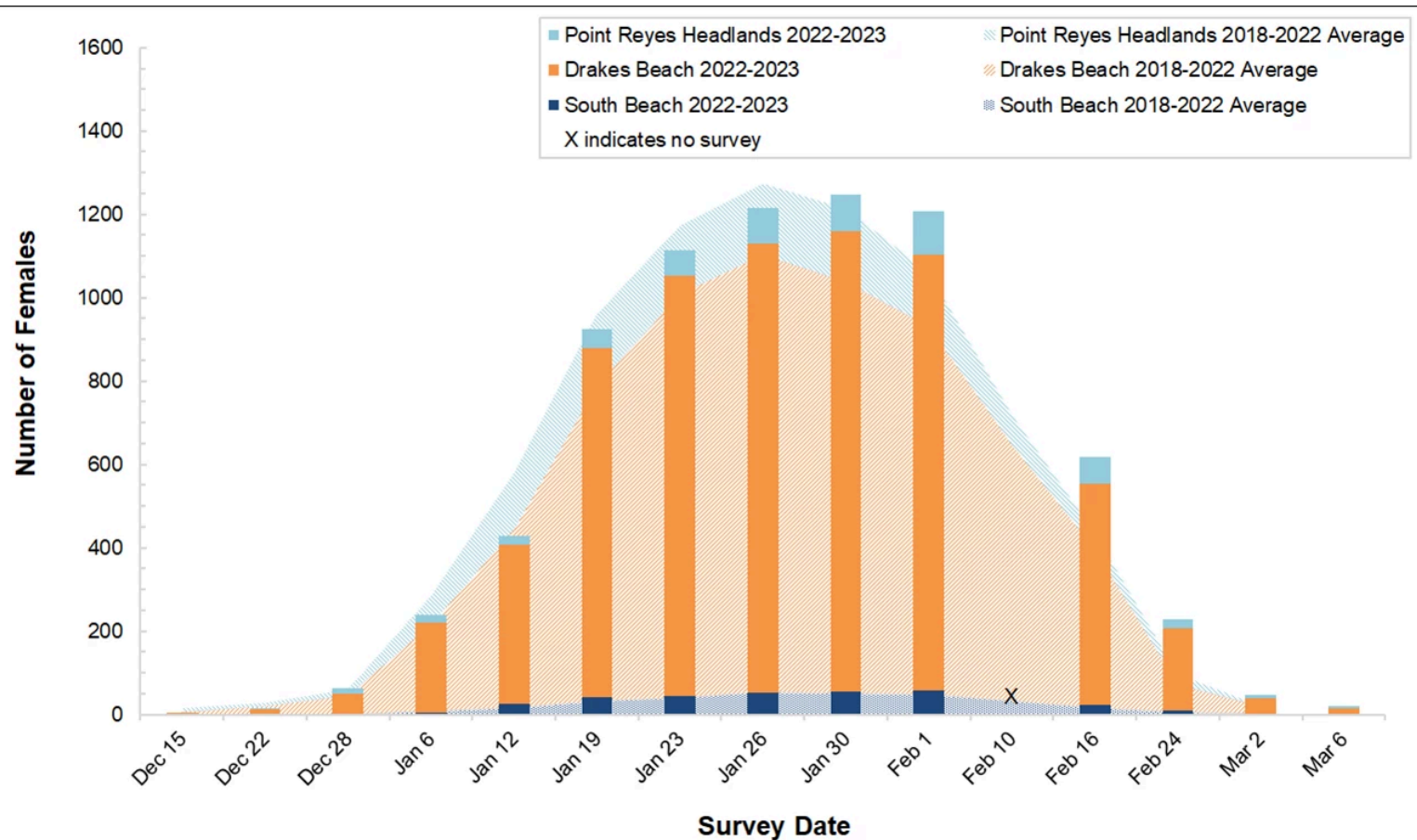
A glance at elephant seal population numbers since 2011. This year's peak counts are lower than last year's for all categories which is likely due to the large storms that occurred in early January right at the start of pupping season.

Total Elephant Seal Counts, Winter 2022-2023



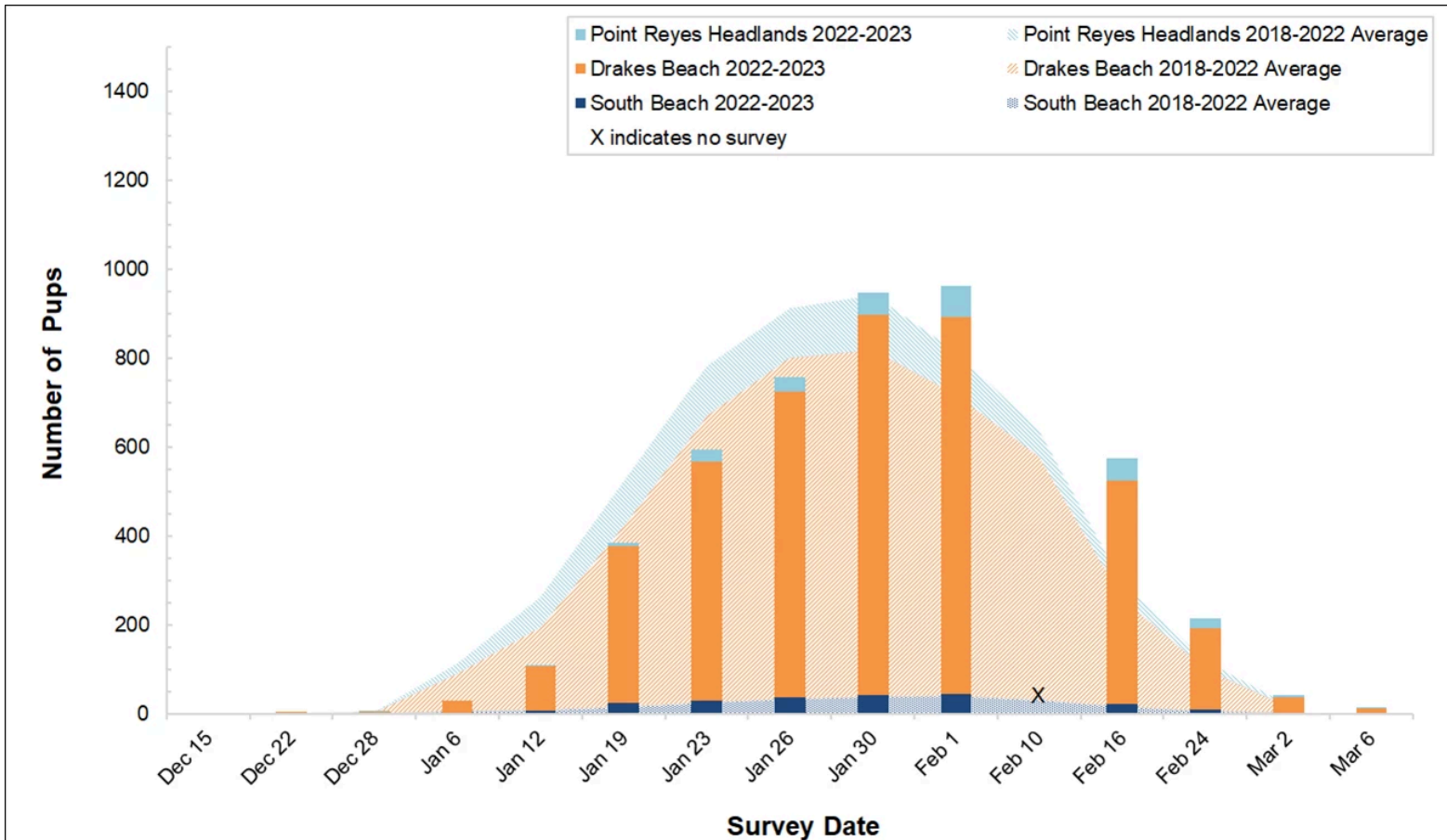
Total elephant seal counts this season compared to average totals from 2018-2022 at the three Point Reyes National Seashore breeding colonies. This year's total count is similar to the average; however, the Drakes Beach colony has numbers above average and the Point Reyes Headlands are below average.

Female Elephant Seal Counts, Winter 2022-2023



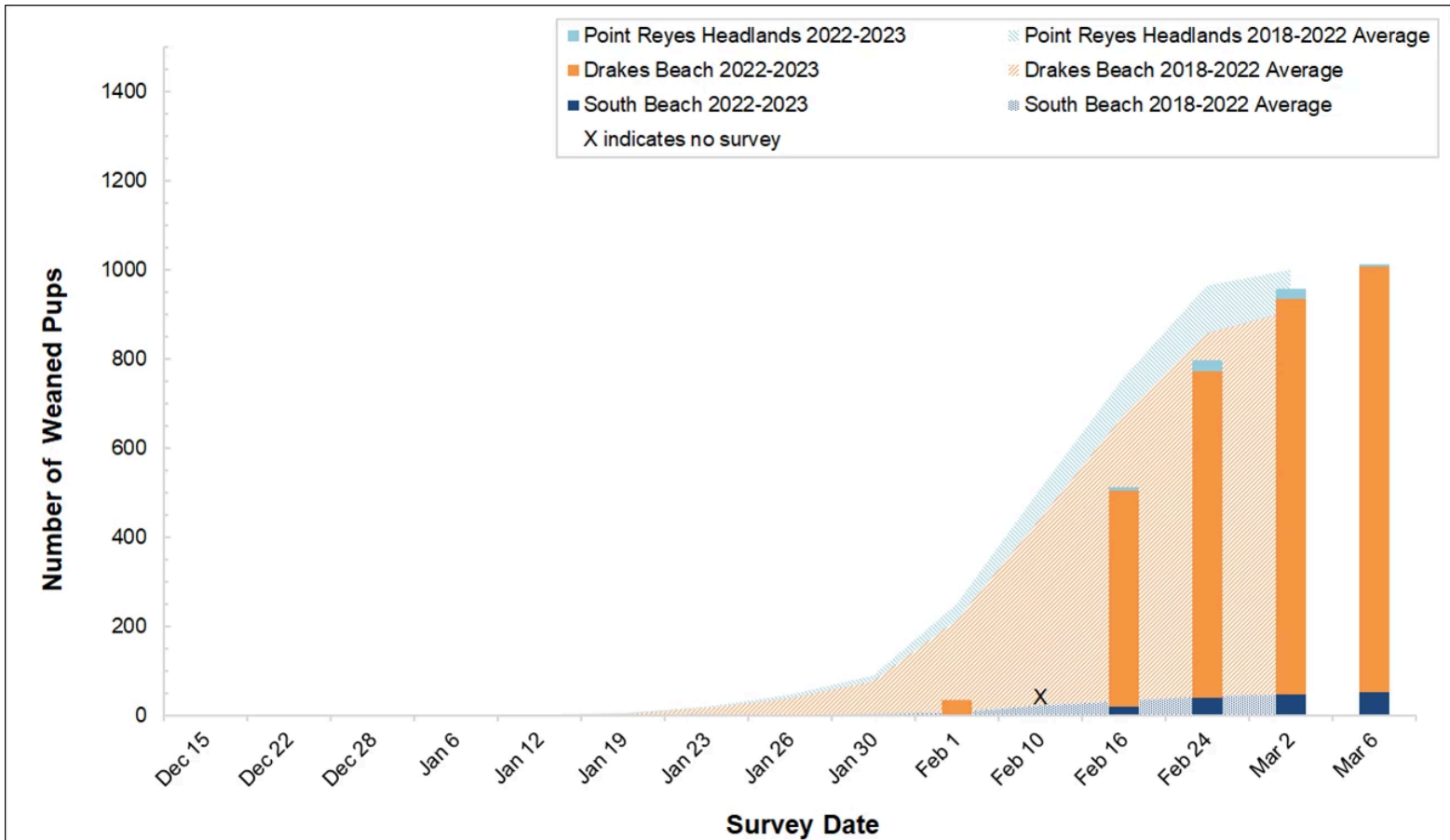
Female elephant seal counts this season compared to average female counts from 2018-2022 at the three Point Reyes National Seashore breeding colonies. The total number of cows on Point Reyes beaches is similar to the average; however, the Drakes Beach colony has numbers above average and the Point Reyes Headlands are below average.

Elephant Seal Pup Counts, Winter 2022-2023



Number of elephant seal nursing pups counted at the three breeding colonies in Point Reyes this winter compared to the average number of pups surveyed at those colonies between 2018 and 2022. The first pup of the season was counted on December 20th. This year's pup counts are similar yet slightly below average, but the peak has shifted, likely because of storms early in the season.

Elephant Seal Weaned Pup Counts, Winter 2022-2023



Number of elephant seal weaned pups counted at the three breeding colonies in Point Reyes this winter compared to the average number of pups surveyed at those colonies between 2018 and 2022. This year's weaned pup counts are below average for all sites, likely because of storms early in the season.

Weekly Updates Recap

January 13, 2023 - Pup Basics

January 20, 2023 - Baby on Board!

January 28, 2023 - That's Got to Hurt!

February 3, 2023 - Special Guests!

February 10, 2023 - Tag, You're It!

February 17, 2023

February 24, 2023 - Let's Dive Deep!

March 3, 2023 - Pregnancy Pause!

March 10, 2023 - To Fast or Not to Fast!?



PHOTO GALLERY

Elephant Seal Photos, Winter 2...

34 IMAGES

Monitoring elephant seals at Point Reyes as they come ashore to give birth to their pups and to mate always yields lots of cool photographs. These are from the 2022-2023 monitoring season.

National Park Service scientists took the photos contained in this gallery while conducting scientific research. As per the Marine Mammal Protection Act, park scientists have a permit from the National Marine Fisheries Service to enter elephant seal protection areas that are otherwise closed to the public. Disrupting behavioral patterns of seals is prohibited and park scientists have been trained to reduce the possibility of disturbing the seals. Please adhere to all elephant seal protection closures, and stay at least 25 feet away from seals outside of the protection closures. Check out these [seal viewing tips](https://www.nps.gov/pore/planyourvisit/wildlife_viewing_tips) (https://www.nps.gov/pore/planyourvisit/wildlife_viewing_tips)

[Elephant Seal Seasonal Monitoring Updates Home >> \(https://www.nps.gov/rlc/pacificcoast/elephant-seal-updates.htm\)](#)

[Elephant Seal Colonies and Beach Closures Map >> \(https://www.nps.gov/maps/stories/meet-the-point-reyes-elephant-seal-colonies.html\)](#)

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sfan

san francisco bay area

seasonal update

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northern elephant seals

elephant seals

mirounga angustirostris

seals

monitoring

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