



ARTICLE

Elephant Seal Monitoring Season Summary: Winter 2020-2021

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

Season Highlights

- Elephant seal population numbers are slightly higher than they were in winter 2020.
- Drakes Beach continued a trend of population increase and movement up the beach towards the visitor center.
- In January, a big storm from the south caused pup separations and some mortality but overall mortality was low this year. Hundreds of fat healthy pups are on the beach!



A cove full of seals near the peak of the season. The highest number of seals in the park are usually counted in late January.
NPS / Marjorie Cox, NMFS Permit No. 21425

Visitor's View

In 2019 a group of nursing females and their pups occupied the beach right in front of the Ken Patrick Visitor Center, pushed into the area by a big winter storm. This occurrence caused a total closure of Drakes Beach. In the last two years park staff have used deterrence methods to prevent females from pupping on the beach in front of the visitor center. However, this year a big storm rolled through causing females to move to this larger

area and a pup was born on the beach overnight. Eventually, a harem of about 20 females formed. Drakes Beach was once again closed in its entirety, but visitors had a great view of nursing moms, pups, and the beachmaster from the sidewalk!



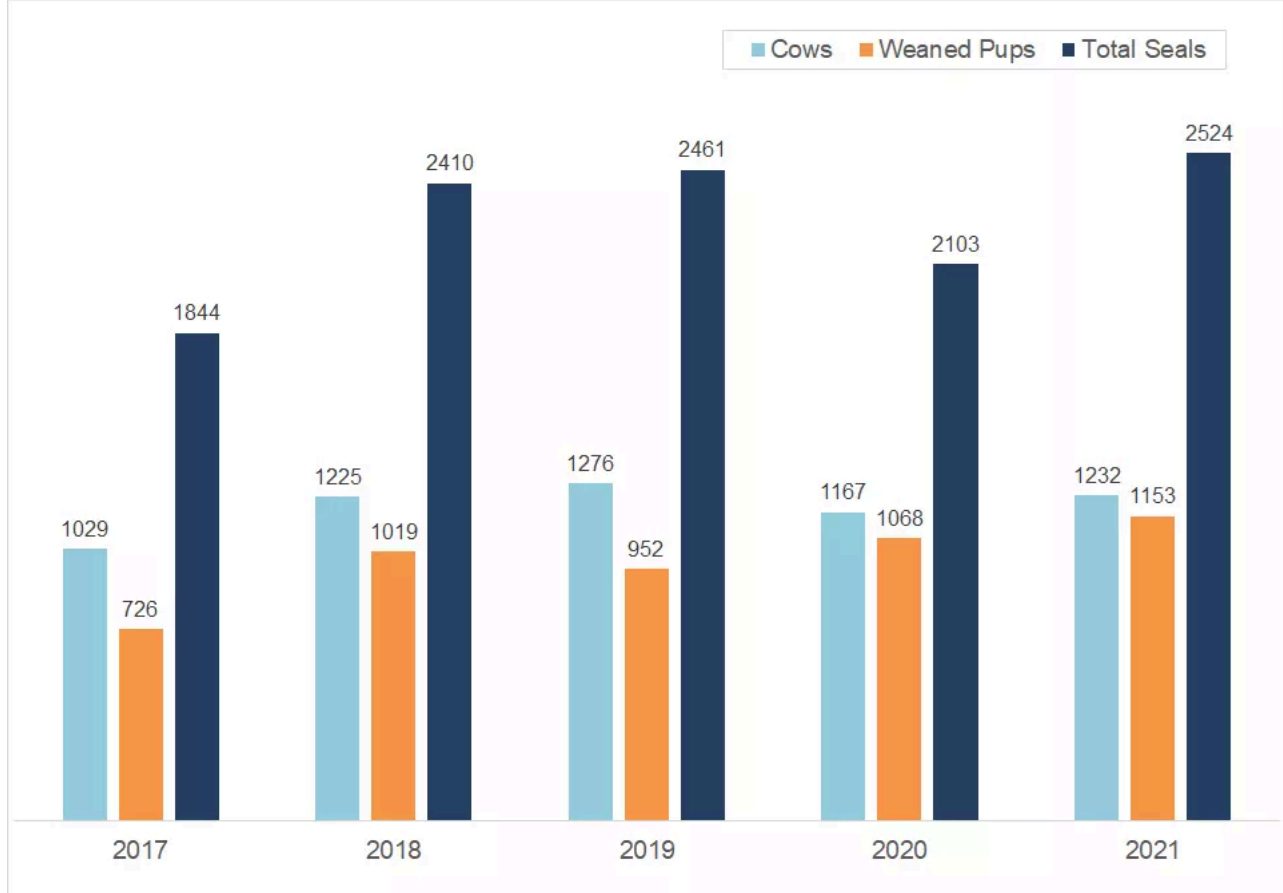
Drakes Beach was closed this season in its entirety, but visitors had a great view of nursing moms, pups, and the beachmaster from the sidewalk!
NPS / Marjorie Cox, NMFS Permit No. 21425



Moms and pups of the KPVC harem. 14 pups were born here, with 13 surviving to weaning.
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By the Numbers

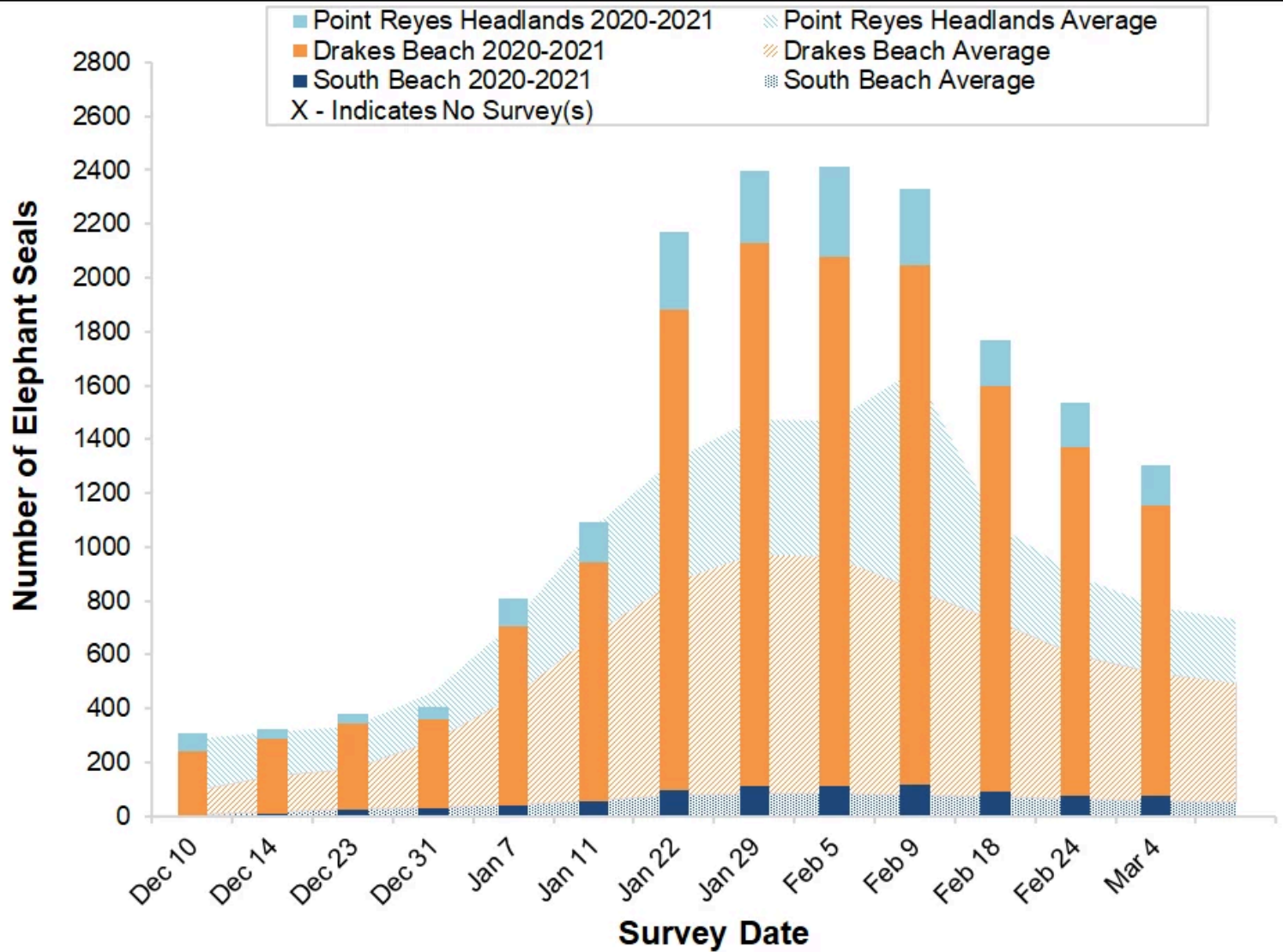
Elephant Seal Seasonal Peaks, 2017-2021 (from direct ground counts)



This year's weaned pup count is the highest count on record.

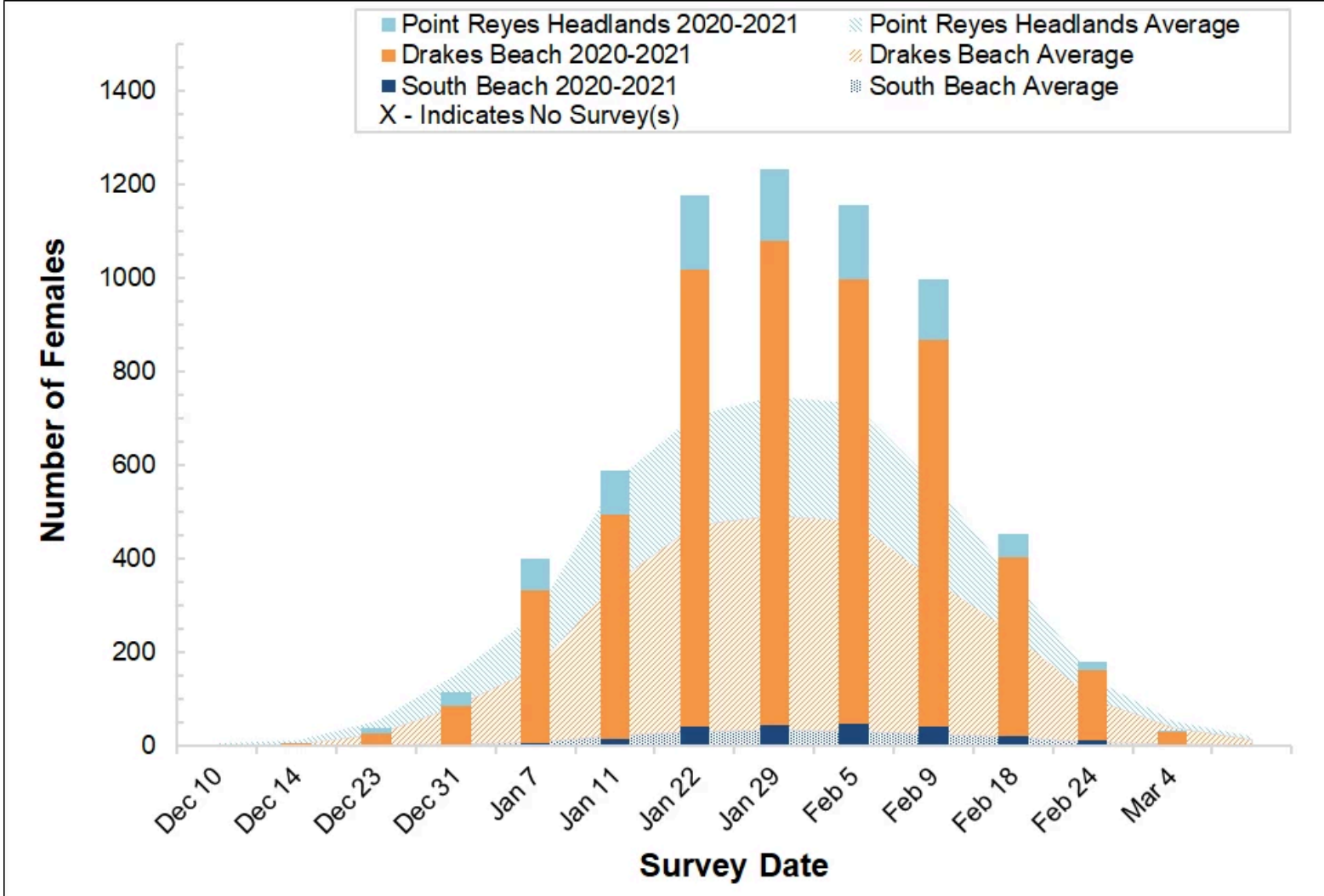
A comparison of the last five years of elephant seal population numbers shows a growth trend. Last year's peak cow count is slightly lower than 2019, but that could be due to poor visibility during surveys at the peak of the season. This year's weaned pup count is the highest count on record.

Total Elephant Seal Counts, Winter 2020-2021



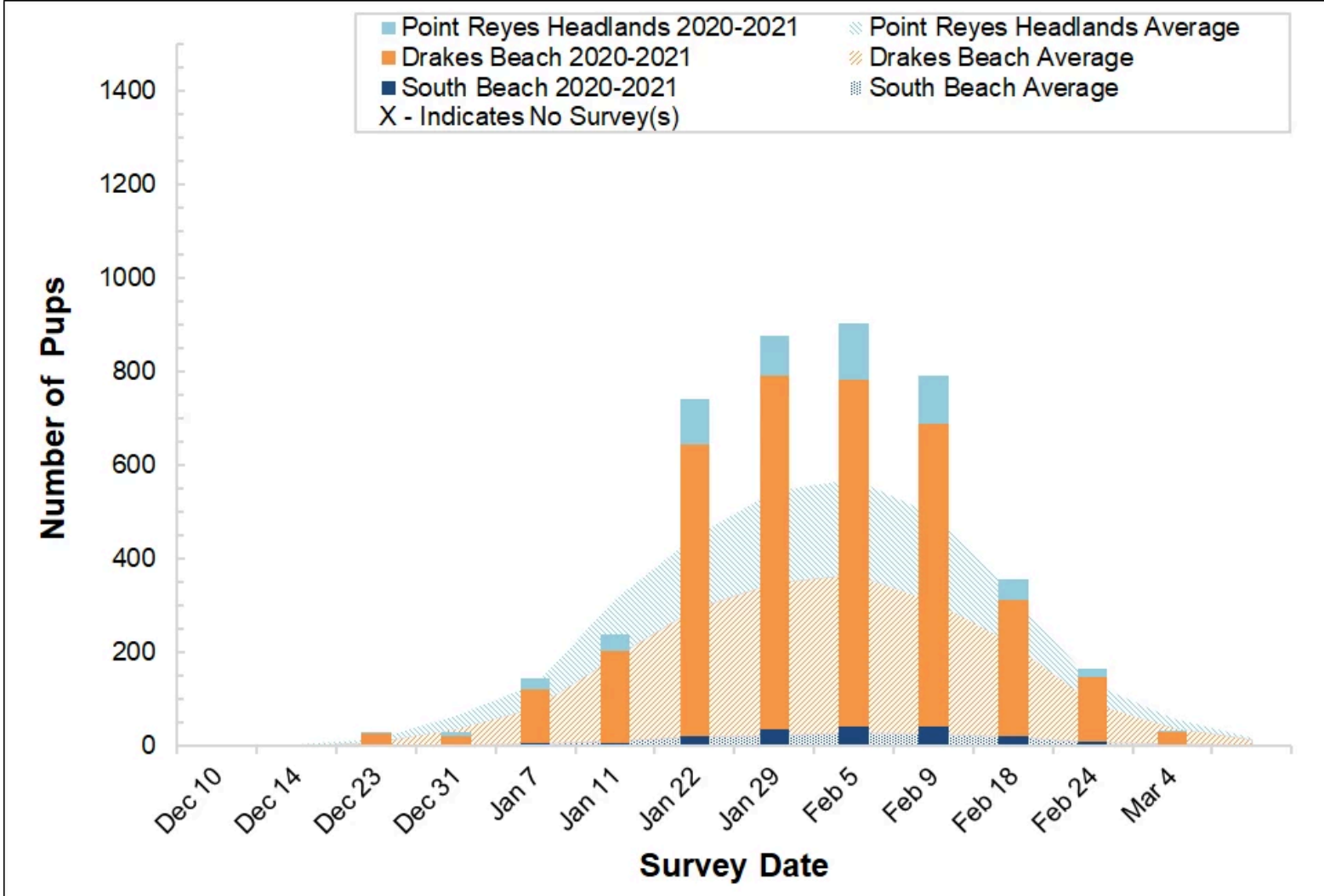
Total elephant seal counts this season compared to average totals from 2005-2017 at the three Point Reyes National Seashore breeding colonies. Counts this year are above average starting in mid/late January.

Female Elephant Seal Counts, Winter 2020-2021



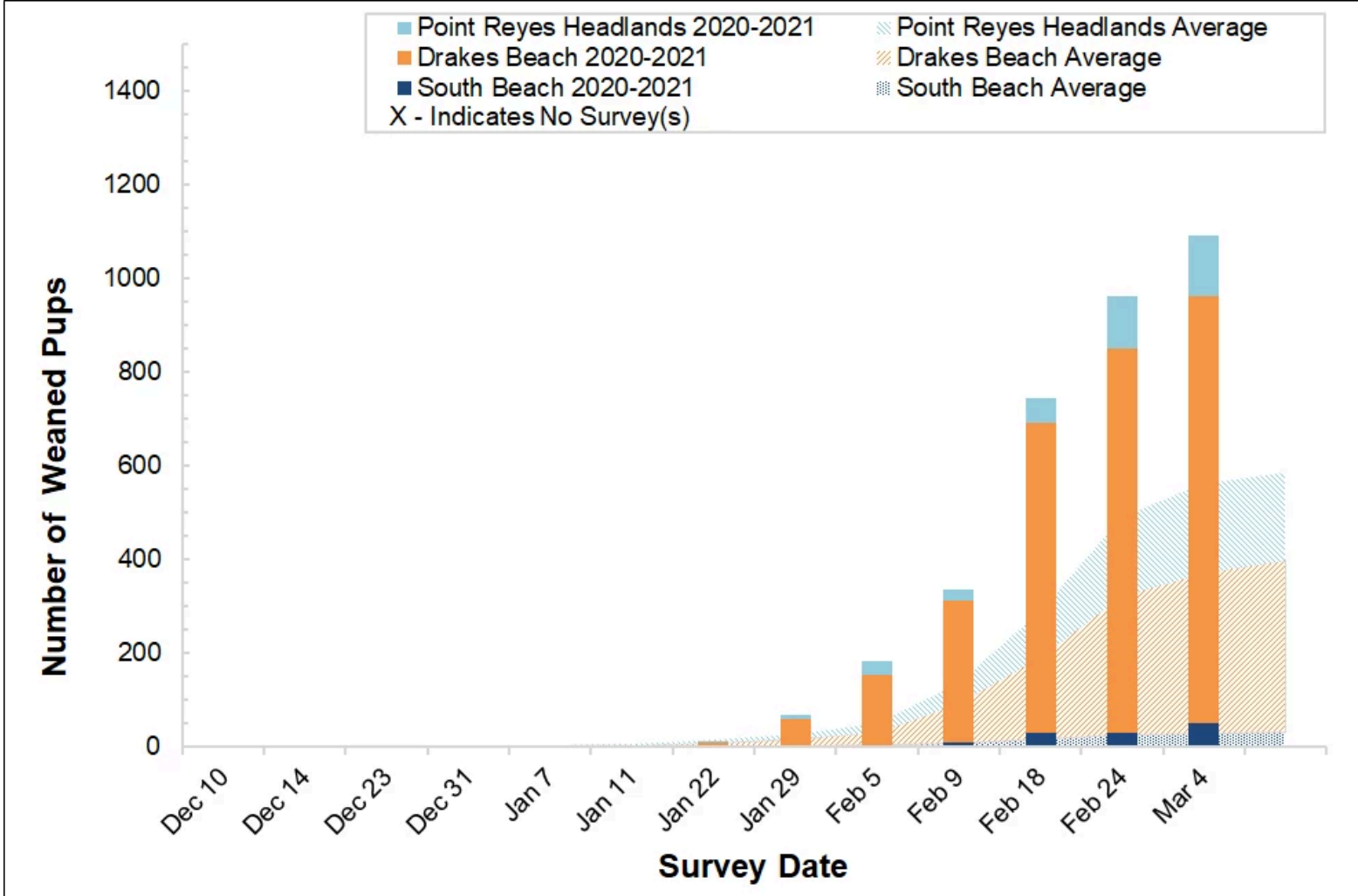
Female elephant seal counts this season compared to average female counts from 2005-2017 at the three Point Reyes National Seashore breeding colonies. The total number of cows on Point Reyes beaches is above average starting in mid/late January.

Elephant Seal Pup Counts, Winter 2020-2021



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 2005 and 2017. The first pup of the season was counted on December 21.

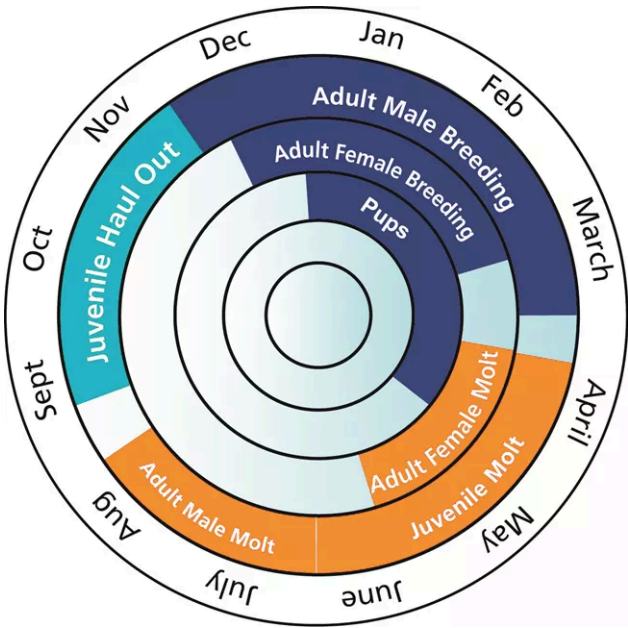
Weaned Elephant Seal Counts, Winter 2020-2021



Number of elephant seal weaned pups counted at the three breeding colonies in Point Reyes this winter compared to the average number of weaned pups surveyed at those colonies between 2005 and 2017. The first weaned pup of the season was counted on January 19.

The Seal Cycle

While the breeding season is the most populous and active time for elephant seals at Point Reyes, the seals are 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. The peak of female molting begins in April, but park researchers have already seen a few returning adult female "molters". It would be highly unusual for a full-term pregnant female to arrive this late, so if you see a large female seal, she is most likely returning to shed her fur and first layer of skin.



The yearly cycle of haul out for elephant seals.



An adult female seal, likely returning to molt, amongst a group of weaned pups.
NPS / Marjorie Cox, NMFS Permit No. 21425

Weekly Updates Recap

January 8, 2021 - Dive Into Elephant Seals & RIP? More Like NAP!

January 15, 2021 - SEALcialDistancing & Marvelous Milk

January 22, 2021 - Tongue Talk & Spotlight on the Headlands

January 29, 2021 - Seals in Charge & Its Not Snot!

February 5, 2021 - Spotlight on South Beach & Shark Attack!

February 12, 2021 - Spotlight on Elephant Seal Overlook & Pup Pods

February 19, 2021 - Spotlight on Drakes Beach & Tagging Time!

February 26, 2021 - Fuzzy Black to Smooth Silver & Who's the Boss?

March 5, 2021 - Dis-entanglement Success & Battle to the Death...of Naptime!



PHOTO GALLERY

Elephant Seal Photos, Winter 2...

63 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 2020-2021 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_elephantseals.htm#CP_JUMP_5649659) (https://www.nps.gov/pore/planyourvisit/wildlife_viewing_elephantseals.htm#CP_JUMP_5649659) for more information.

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

[Elephant Seal Colonies and Beach Closures Map](https://www.nps.gov/gis/storymaps/mapjournal/v2/index.html?appid=e8bb151bcf7e451b916f059e52314dd4)
[.https://www.nps.gov/gis/storymaps/mapjournal/v2/index.html?appid=e8bb151bcf7e451b916f059e52314dd4\)](https://www.nps.gov/gis/storymaps/mapjournal/v2/index.html?appid=e8bb151bcf7e451b916f059e52314dd4)

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marine mammals

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