



ARTICLE

Elephant Seal Monitoring Season Summary: Winter 2019-2020

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

Season Overview

- [Elephant seal](https://www.nps.gov/rlc/pacificcoast/elephant-seals.htm) (<https://www.nps.gov/rlc/pacificcoast/elephant-seals.htm>) population numbers are similar to last year.
- Biologists missed no weekly surveys due to weather, however haze and fog affected visibility at some sites.
- A mild winter contributed to low pup mortality with about 1,000 pups surviving to weaning.
- Deterrence methods to move pregnant females from the beach in front of Ken Patrick Visitor Center appeared successful, with the majority of hazed females re-sighted with pups farther south on Drakes Beach.



A group of females and their pups on Drakes Beach.

NPS / Marjorie Cox, NMFS Permit No. 21425



A fully molted, weaned pup.
NPS / Marjorie Cox NMFS Permit No. 21425



A weaned pup vocalizing.
NPS / Marjorie Cox, NMFS Permit No. 21425

Tag-stravaganza!

Year	Number Tagged
2016	369
2017	361
2018	415
2019	492
2020	536

Unique Animals Tagged

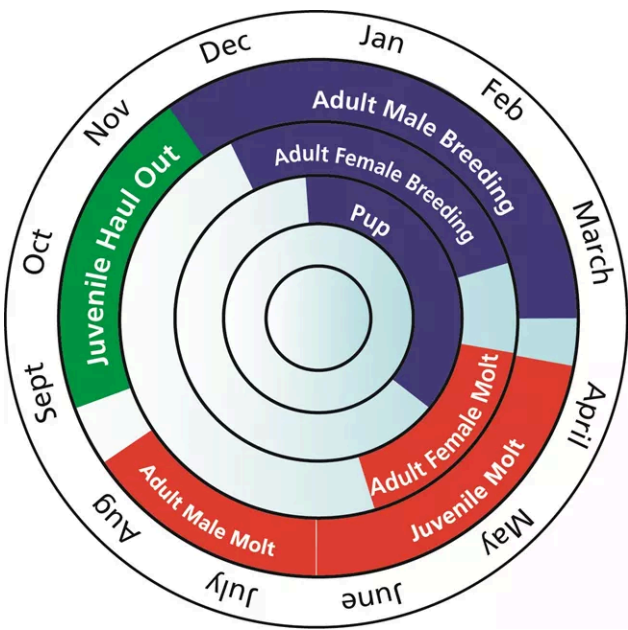
Researchers at Point Reyes have been successful in increasing the number of seal taggings over the past three years. Tagging opportunities are tide and weather dependent, but another factor in this success is the dynamic movement of the seals within the park. Over the past several years the number of pups born on Drakes Beach has increased dramatically. Unlike some of the ocean facing colonies under steep cliffs, Drakes Beach is accessible to researchers. More accessible pups mean more accessible hind flippers, and more accessible hind flippers means more tags deployed!



A researcher approaches a sleeping seal to apply a flipper tag.
 NPS / Marjorie Cox, NMFS Permit No. 21425

Seasons of the Seal

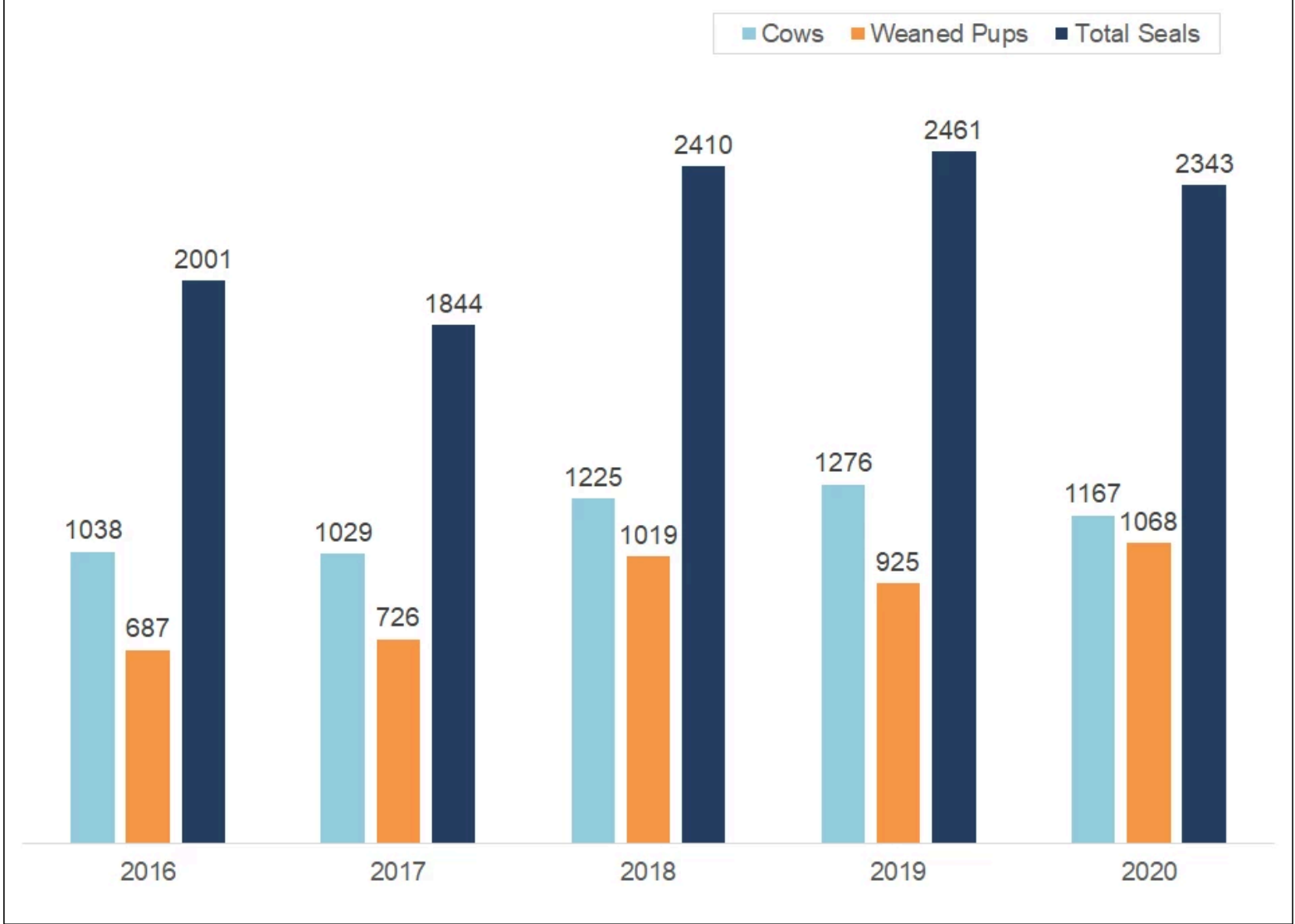
Point Reyes beaches are full of weaned elephant seal pups. As the seals get older and bolder it is more common to see them paddling around in shallow water close to shore. Adult females here for pupping and breeding have all departed, but a few newly arrived adult females that are here to molt have been spotted in the park. While the majority of molting females arrive in April, it is not uncommon for a few early arrivals to show up in March. During the molt season, seals are often in very close contact with other seals, much closer than a female with a pup would tolerate! The body contact, and the heat it generates, is a benefit to the molting process.



Males, females, juveniles, and/or pups are present at Point Reyes at various times throughout the year.

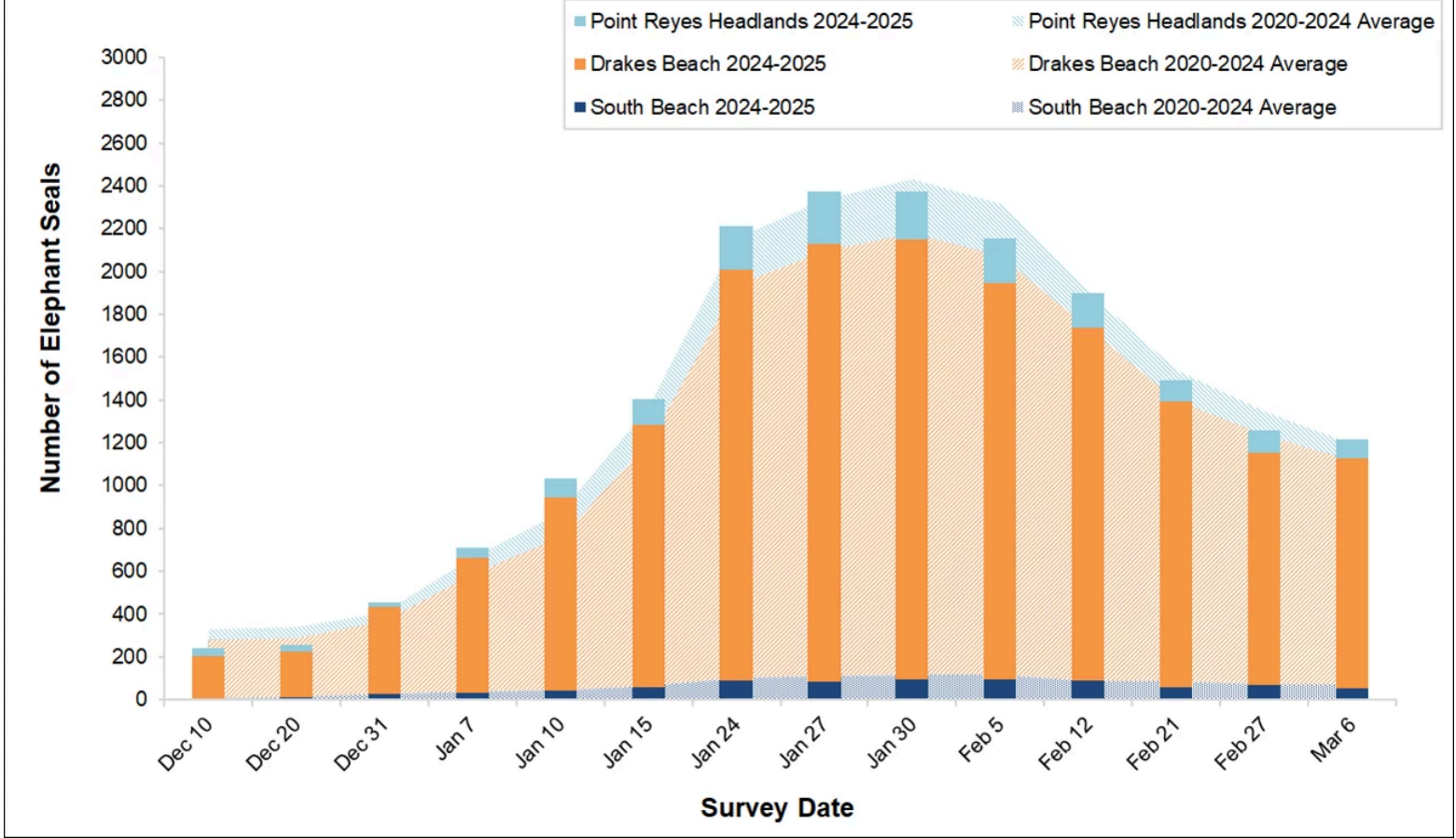
By the Numbers

Elephant Seal Seasonal Peak Numbers Mostly Rising



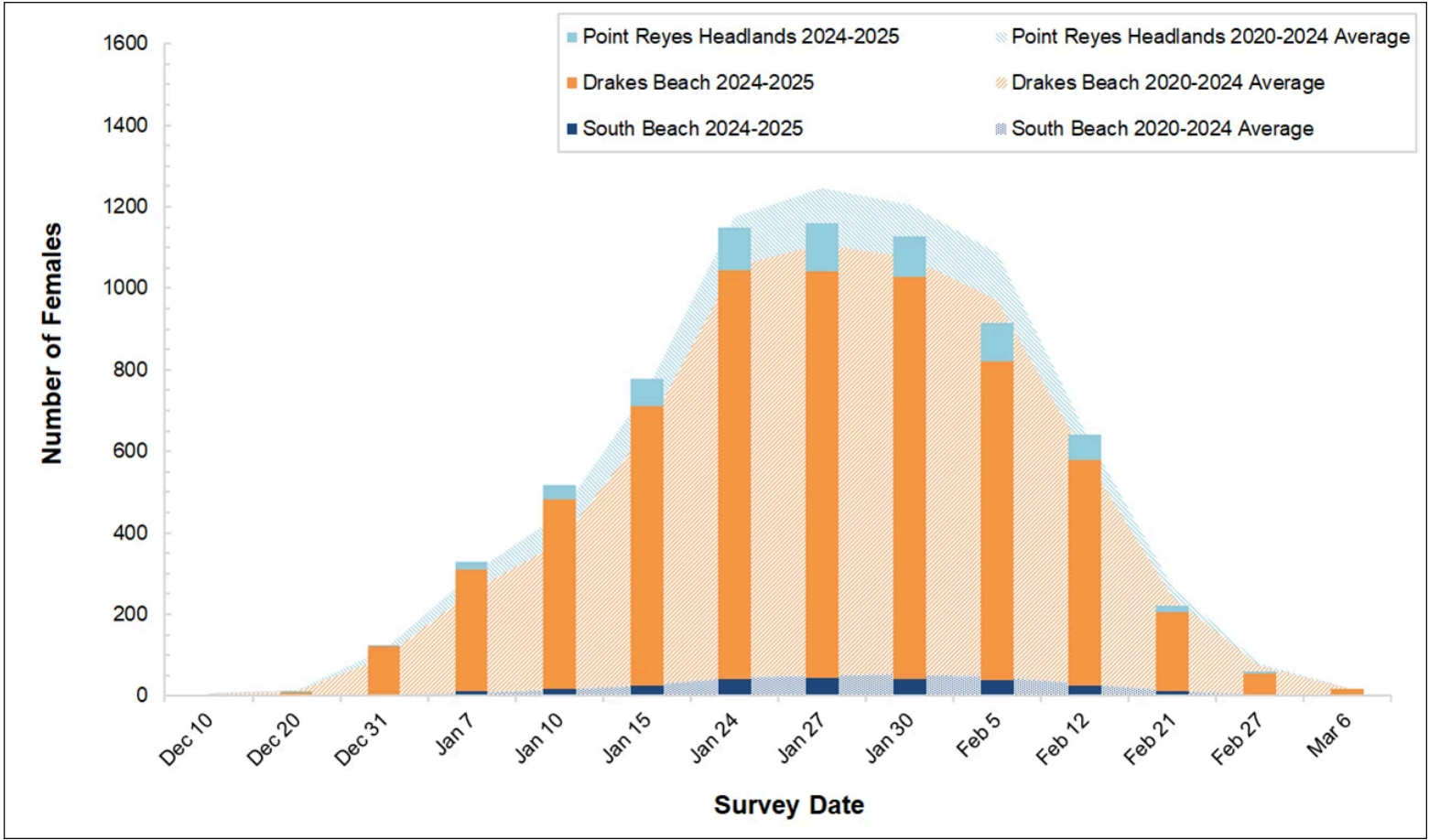
A comparison of the last five years of elephant seal population numbers shows a growth trend. This year's peak cow count is slightly lower than last year, but that could be due to poor visibility during surveys at the peak of the season. The weaned pup count is the highest count on record.

Total Elephant Seal Counts, Winter 2019-2020



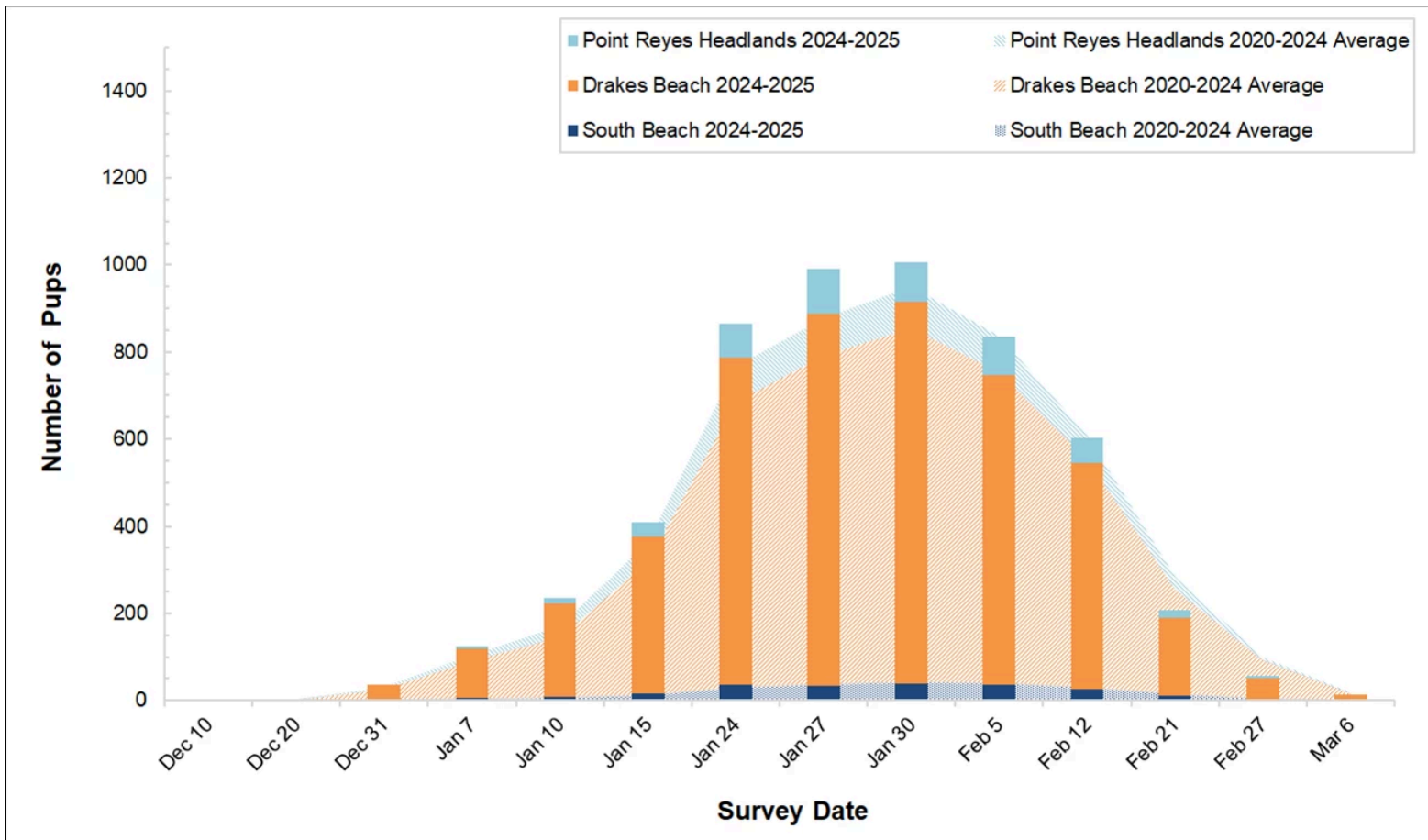
Total elephant seal counts this season compared to average totals from 2020-2024 at the three Point Reyes National Seashore breeding colonies. This year's total count is similar to the five-year average. The Drakes Beach colony has numbers above the five-year average. The Point Reyes Headlands colony has numbers above the five-year average.

Female Elephant Seal Counts, Winter 2024-2025



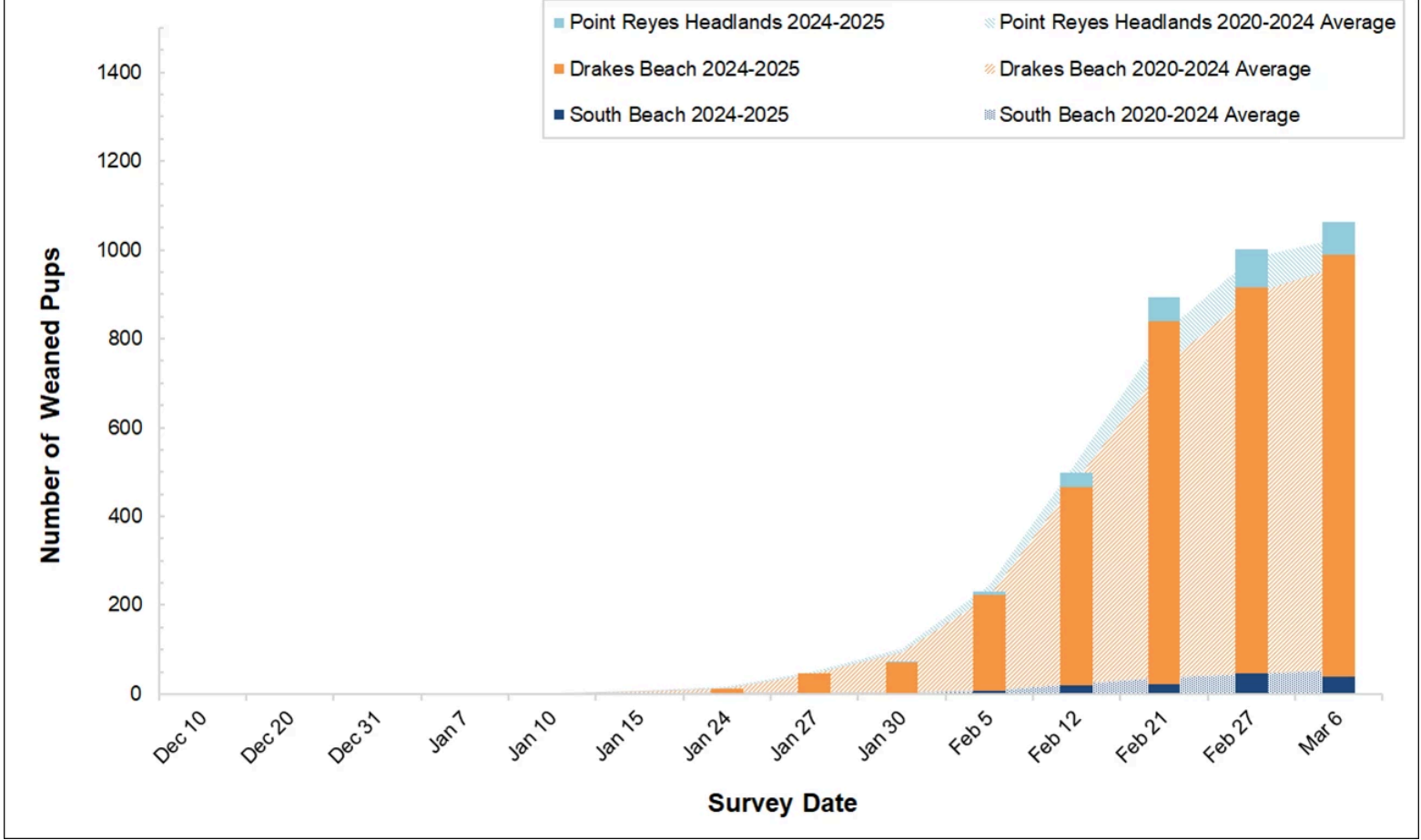
Female elephant seal counts this season compared to average female counts from 2020-2024 at the three Point Reyes National Seashore breeding colonies. The total number of cows on Point Reyes beaches is similar to the five-year average at each of the three colonies.

Elephant Seal Pup Counts, Winter 2024-2025



Number of elephant seal nursing pups counted at the three breeding colonies in Point Reyes National Seashore compared to the average number of pups surveyed at those colonies between 2020-2024. This year's pup count is similar to the five-year average.

Elephant Seal Weaned Pup Counts, Winter 2024-2025



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 2020-2024. This year's weaned pup counts are above the five-year average.

Weekly Updates Recap

<u>January 3, 2020 - Elephant Seal 101 & Dominance Decides</u>
<u>January 10, 2020 -Journey of M433, aka G1 & Tide is High</u>
<u>January 17, 2020 - Pup Parade & Snout with the Clout</u>
<u>January 24, 2020 - Plumping of the Pups & Super Moms</u>
<u>January 31, 2020 -Clear Lungs, Full Hearts, Can't Lose! & Windows to the Stomach</u>
<u>February 7, 2020 - EGGxactly Right & Lucky Lady</u>
<u>February 14, 2020 - Chunky Not Choosy & Deep Diners</u>
<u>February 21, 2020 - If You Lead A Seal To Water & Tag Team</u>
<u>February 28, 2020 - Weaners Gonna Wade & Mating Matters</u>
<u>March 6, 2020 - Keep Cool & Sites from Sea</u>

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

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