



ARTICLE

Elephant Seal Monitoring Season Summary: Winter 2018–2019

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

Season Overview

- Elephant seal population numbers were similar to last year, showing a minimal increase.
- The government shutdown reduced population and tag re-sight data collected this year.
- Winter storms caused some pup mortality. Approximately 900 pups survived to weaning, compared to around 1,000 pups last year.
- The seal take-over at the Ken Patrick Visitor Center garnered headlines across the globe.



Visitor center harem during peak of breeding season.

NPS / S. Codde, NMFS Permit No. 21425



A very fat and healthy pup surrounded by adult females.
NPS / M. Cox, NMFS Permit No. 21425

Spotlight On Seals

The big news of the season was the formation of a large harem on the beach directly in front the Ken Patrick Visitor Center. While the recent trend has seen the movement of breeding seals down the length of Drakes Beach between the overlook and the visitor center, we have never had this much activity in front of the parking lot. Last year we had no pups born in this area, and in 2017 we had two pups born there. This expansion coincided with the government shutdown. A lack of people on the beach during this time, may have provided a more desirable pupping environment for females, and storm activity probably moved seals out of less protected ocean facing beaches. Dozens of national and international news outlets covered this phenomenon! Elephant seals, before their dramatic depletion due to hunting, did not haul out on mainland beaches like Drakes, because large predators like grizzly bears were still present in the area.



Interpretive ranger Carlo Arreglo is interviewed by the media.
NPS / NMFS Permit No. 21425



Visitors and a winter wildlife docent observe the visitor center harem.
NPS / Sarah Allen

Research Realized

Despite a 35 day shutdown and not so cooperative weather, park researchers were able to conduct weekly surveys, and document seal numbers in the park this year. In addition to surveys, flipper tagging of seals was conducted. This year researchers decided to attempt tagging of adult females at the visitor center harem, in hopes of determining if the same seals will return to the site in the future. In addition, weaned pups were tagged at all accessible beaches. In total, 6 adult females and 485 weaned pups were tagged! About 50% percent of weaned pups in the park were tagged this year. As seals continue to move into areas more accessible to humans our tagging percentage may increase.



A researcher prepares to apply a flipper tag to a sleeping adult female seal.

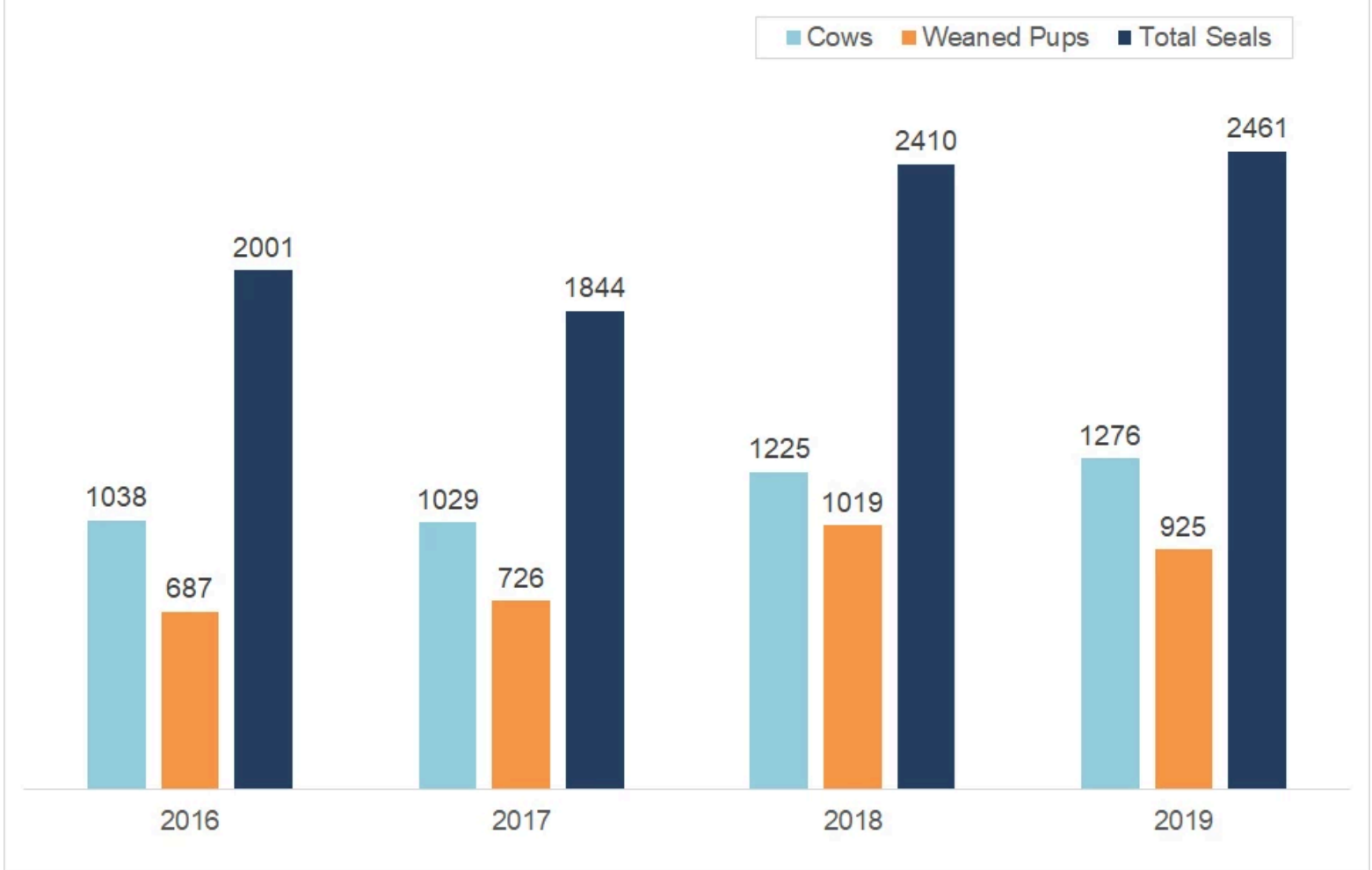
NPS / Sarah Allen



A researcher uses a spotting scope to count seals at a headlands colony.
F. O'Kelly, NMFS Permit No. 21425

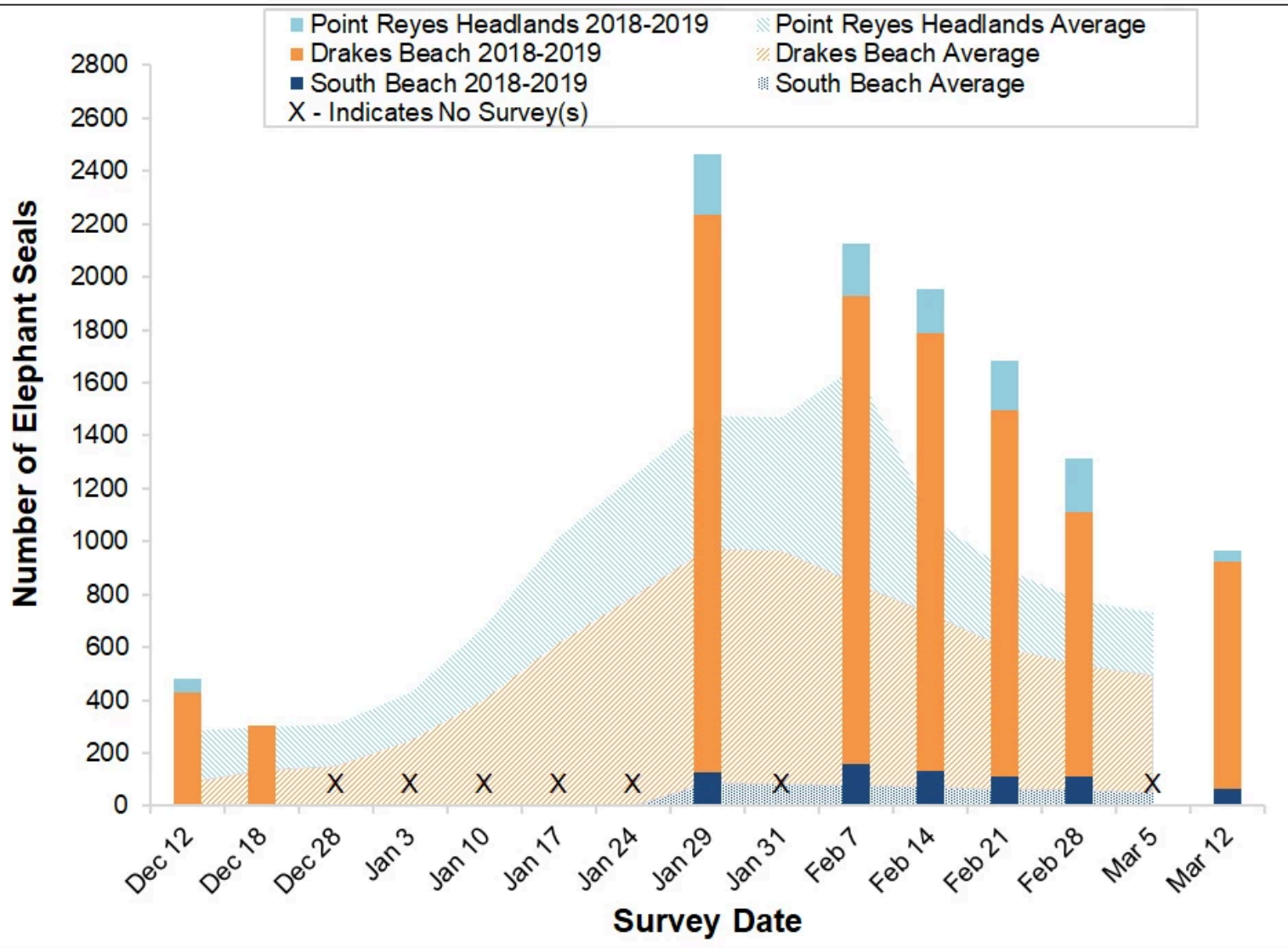
By The Numbers

Elephant Seal Seasonal Peak Numbers Mostly Rising



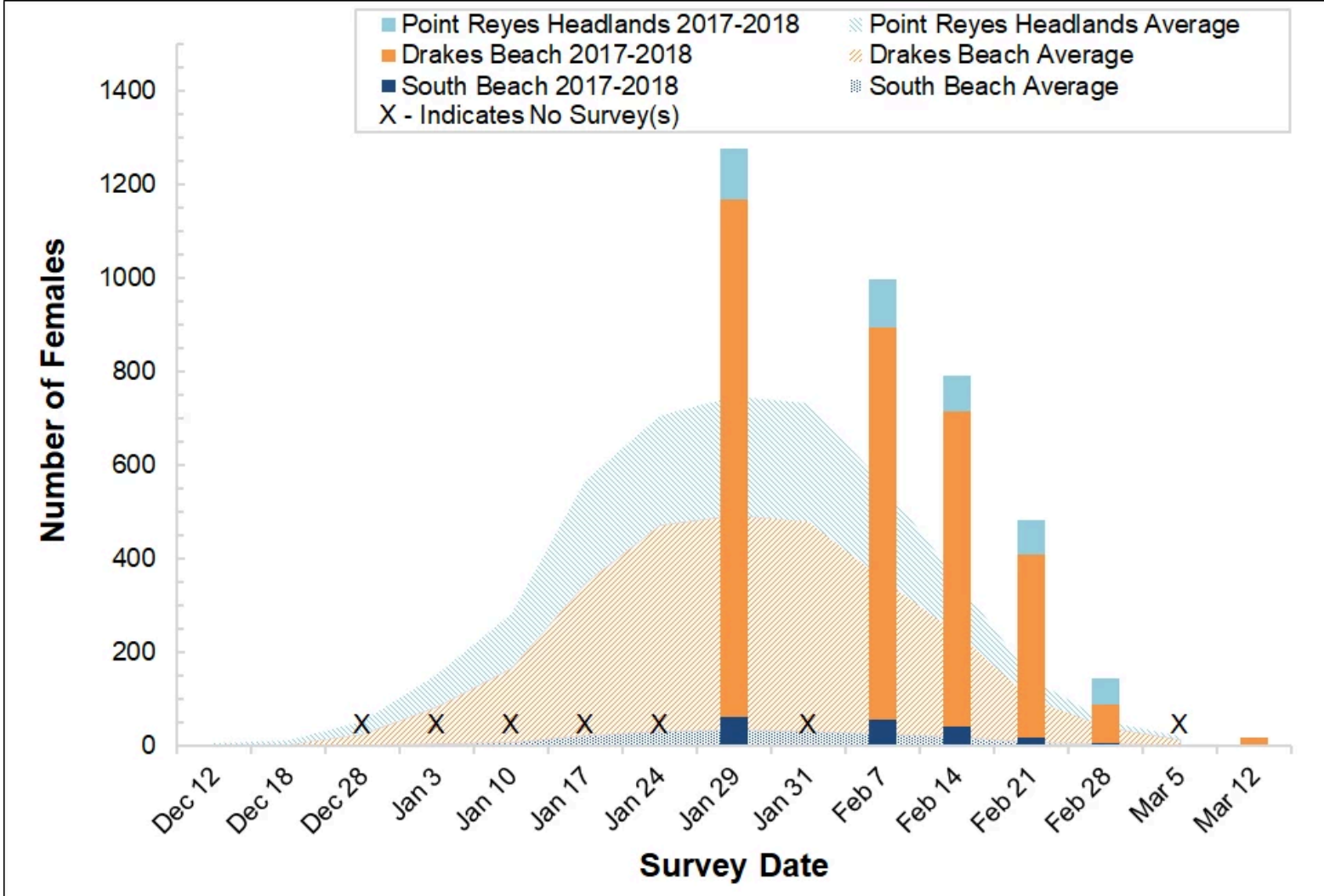
A comparison of the last four years of elephant seal population numbers shows a growth trend. However, this year's numbers were similar to last year.

Total Elephant Seal Counts, Winter 2018-2019



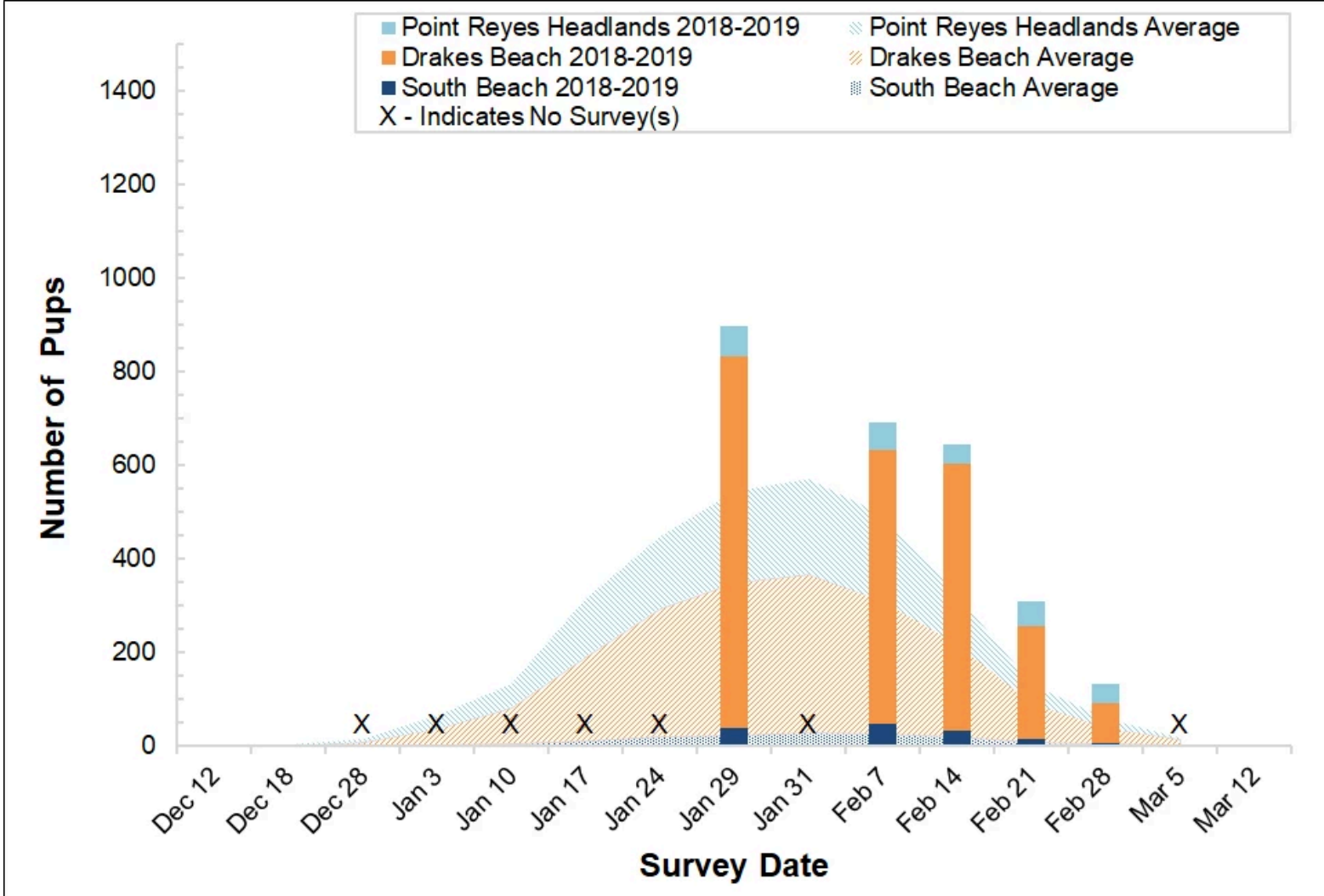
Total elephant seal counts this season compared to average totals from 2005-2017 at the three Point Reyes National Seashore breeding colonies. Surveys this year indicate increasing numbers at the Drakes Beach colony. March 12 does not include 2005-2017 average.

Female Elephant Seal Counts, Winter 2018-2019



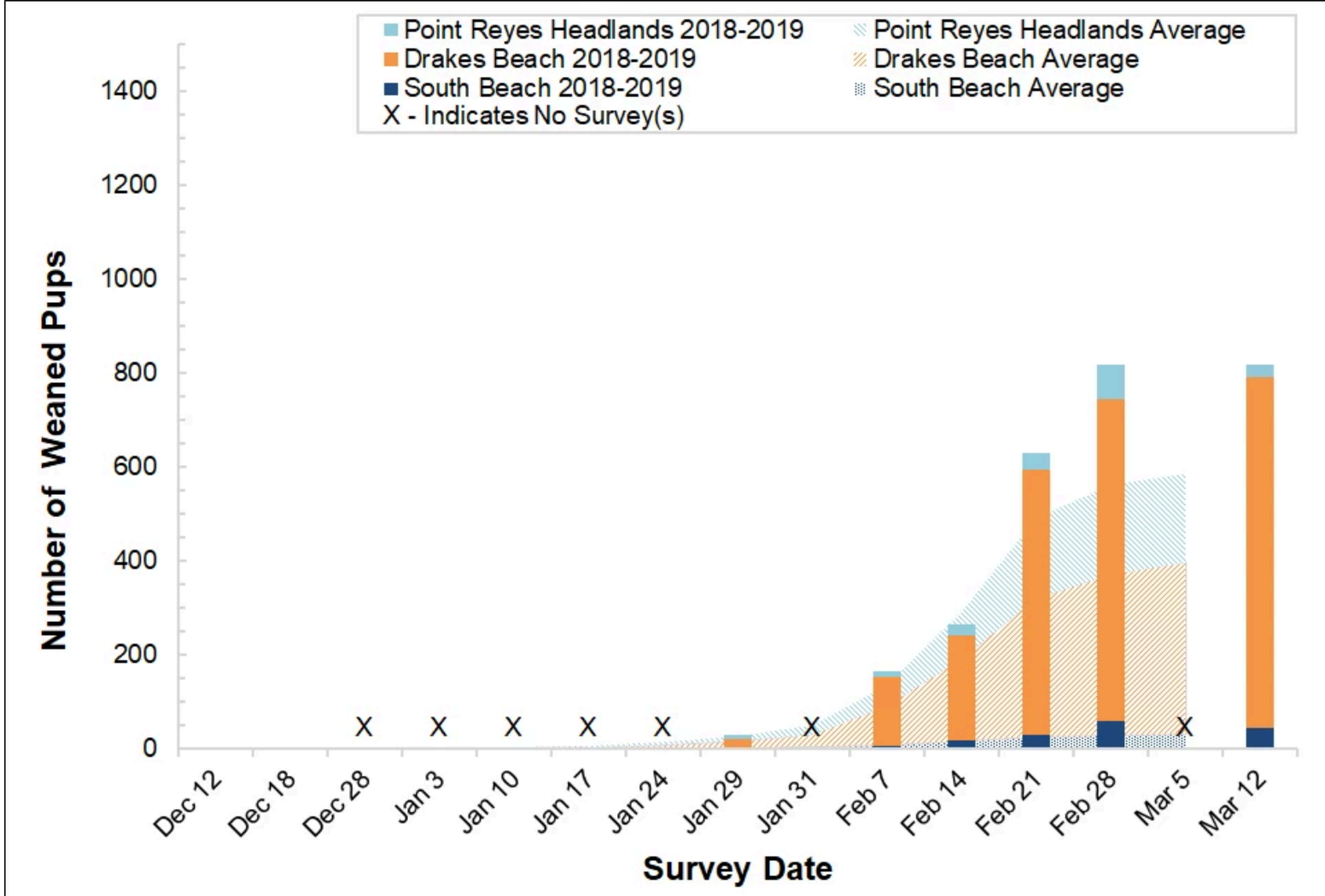
Female elephant seal counts this season compared to average female counts from 2005-2017 at the three Point Reyes breeding colonies. The total number of cows on Point Reyes beaches is significantly higher than average, but not significantly higher than last years counts. The highest increase from the average was seen at Drakes Beach, the Point Reyes Headlands colony is declining, and the South Beach colony numbers are close to the average. March 12 does not include 2005-2017 average.

Elephant Seal Pup Counts, Winter 2018-2019



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. March 12 does not include 2005-2017 average.

Weaned Elephant Seal Counts, Winter 2018-2019



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. March 12 does not include 2005-2017 average.

Weekly Updates Recap

[February 2, 2019 - KPVC Sealebrities & FAQ](#)

[February 8, 2019 - Have You Heard? & What's in a Name?](#)

[February 15, 2019 - Tag! You're...a Seal, Role Call, & A Time to Mate](#)

[February 22, 2019 - Who You Callin' A Slug, Cruise Control, & Delicious Fish](#)

[March 1, 2019 - Satellite Success, Chimney Rock Rocks, & Fatter Up!](#)

[March 8, 2019 - South Beach & Pup Plunge](#)

[March 15, 2019 - Female Farewell & VibrantVibrissae](#)

[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)
[.https://www.nps.gov/gis/storymaps/mapjournal/v2/index.html?](https://www.nps.gov/gis/storymaps/mapjournal/v2/index.html)

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northern elephant seals

seal

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