



ARTICLE

Breeding Elephant Seal Numbers Up This Year

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



Female elephant seals with pups haul out near calm water on Drakes Beach. Photo by Marjorie Cox/NPS.

NPS / Marjorie Cox, NMFS Permit No. 17152-00

March 2018 - Although the 2017–2018 [northern elephant seal](https://www.nps.gov/rlc/pacificcoast/elephant-seals.htm) (*Mirounga angustirostris*) breeding season at Point Reyes National Seashore got off to a late start, seal numbers rapidly grew to a record peak count of 2,411 seals. A very mild winter led to low pup mortality at all of the park's elephant seal colonies, and a peak pup number of 1,020 at the height of the season. Last year's peak pup count was only 726, a lower number that researchers believe was due to that winter's extremely stormy conditions.

Numbers at the Drakes Beach colony continued to increase as the seals have moved farther down the beach from the elephant seal overlook towards the Ken Patrick Visitor Center in recent years. Researchers speculate that seals may be moving from the less protected, ocean-facing Point Reyes Headlands colony to the calmer, sheltered waters at Drakes Beach where pups are less likely to be washed out to sea by rough surf. With so many seals, the park had to increase the size of the normal seasonal beach closure to ensure the safety of seals and park visitors.

For more information see the [2017–2018 seasonal monitoring summary](https://www.nps.gov/articles/elephant-seal-monitoring-season-summary-2017-2018.htm) (<https://www.nps.gov/articles/elephant-seal-monitoring-season-summary-2017-2018.htm>), or reach out to Sarah Codde (<https://www.nps.gov/common/utilities/sendmail/sendemail.cfm?>



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