

National Park Service



2018 Elephant Seal Breeding Season Update January 11 2018



News This Week:

- Cows continue to arrive at all sites
- Steady increase in pup births
- Drakes Beach closure begins

Breeding season continues to ramp up! Drakes Beach closure is in effect, as we have seen a marked increase in cows and pups on the beach. The closure area begins ½ mile southwest of the Ken Patrick Visitor Center. The Fish Dock is also closed to the public, from the gate and down to the dock itself.

Above: Pup nursing on Point Reyes Headlands

Center: Cow posing with her plump pup

Photos by M. Cox. NMFS Permit No. 17152-00

Top: Adult male trumpeting on Drakes beach

Bottom: Colony at Gus' Cove



Seeing Double

It is common to observe female elephant seals at the colony with two pups in close proximity. It may appear that the cow has birthed twins, but in fact twin births in elephant seals are extremely rare. No eyewitness accounts have ever been documented of the birth of twins in Northern elephant seals. It is more probable that one of the pups has been abandoned or moved away from its actual mother.



Above: Two cows in foreground, each with two pups in close proximity

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It's Not Snot!



Above: Adult male with surfactant in both nostrils.

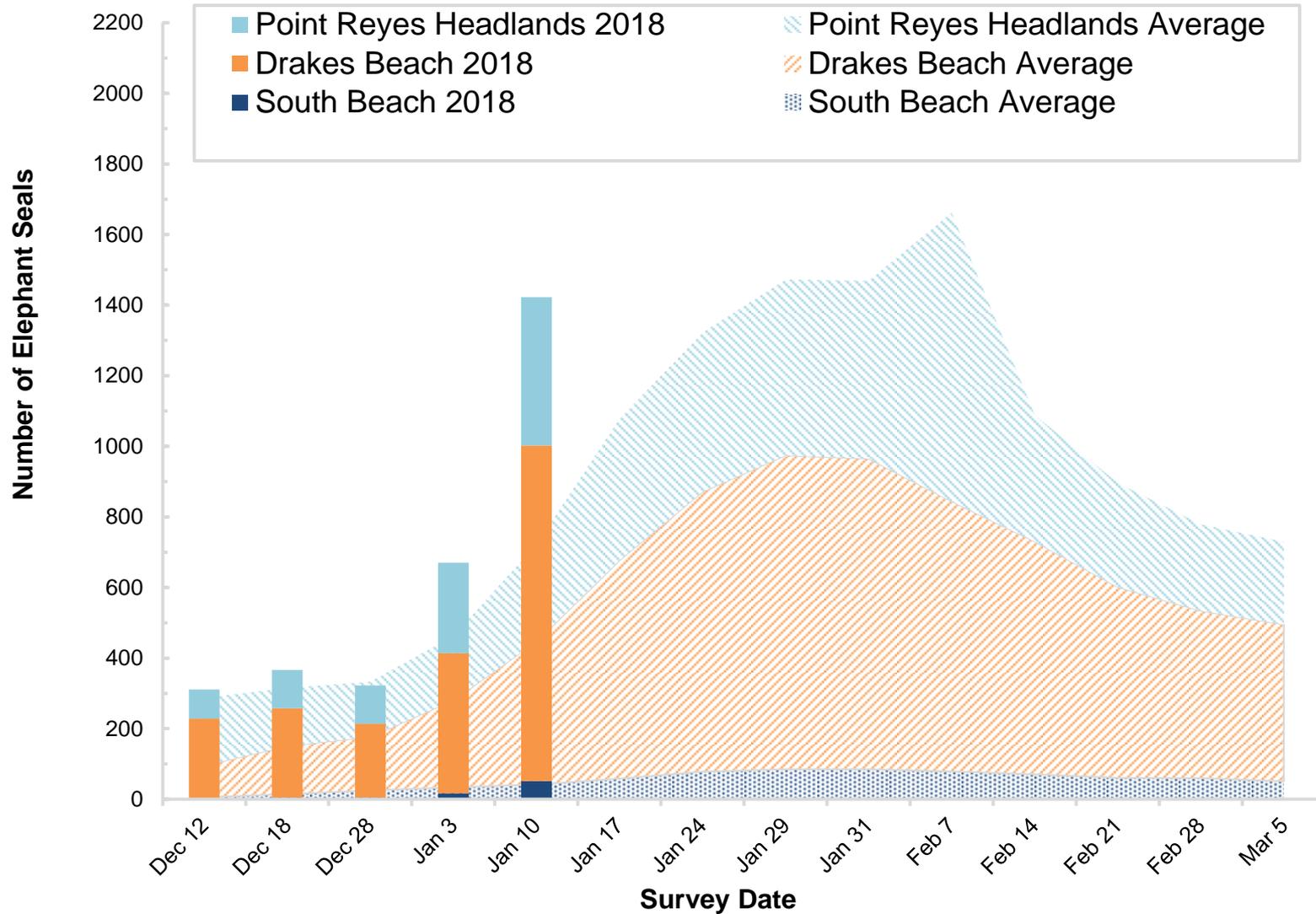
Left: Female snoozing, and undisturbed by surfactant dripping from her left nostril.

Why do elephant seals seem to have perpetually runny noses? It may seem they have a severe case of the sniffles, but in fact this white fluid around their nostrils is pulmonary surfactant! Surfactant is an important substance for mammal respiratory systems, decreasing surface tension of lung fluid, and allowing for gas exchange. In deep diving pinnipeds, like elephant seals, it serves another function. Immense pressure during deep dives collapses the lungs. Pulmonary surfactant acts as a “non-stick” coating that allows lungs to re-expand as the seals rise to the surface.

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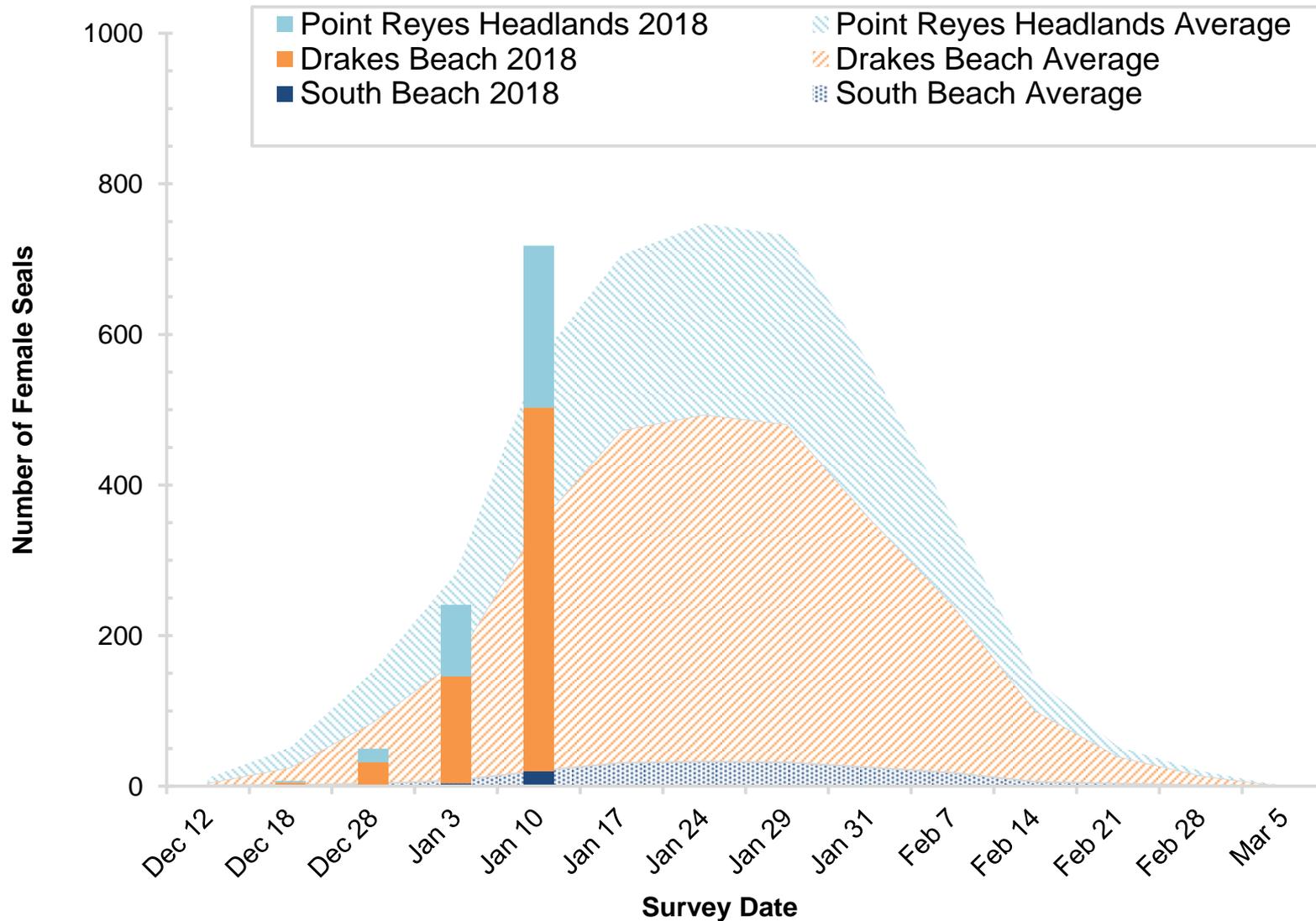
Northern Elephant Seals at Point Reyes National Seashore

Total 2018 Seal Count vs. 2005-2017 Total Seal Average

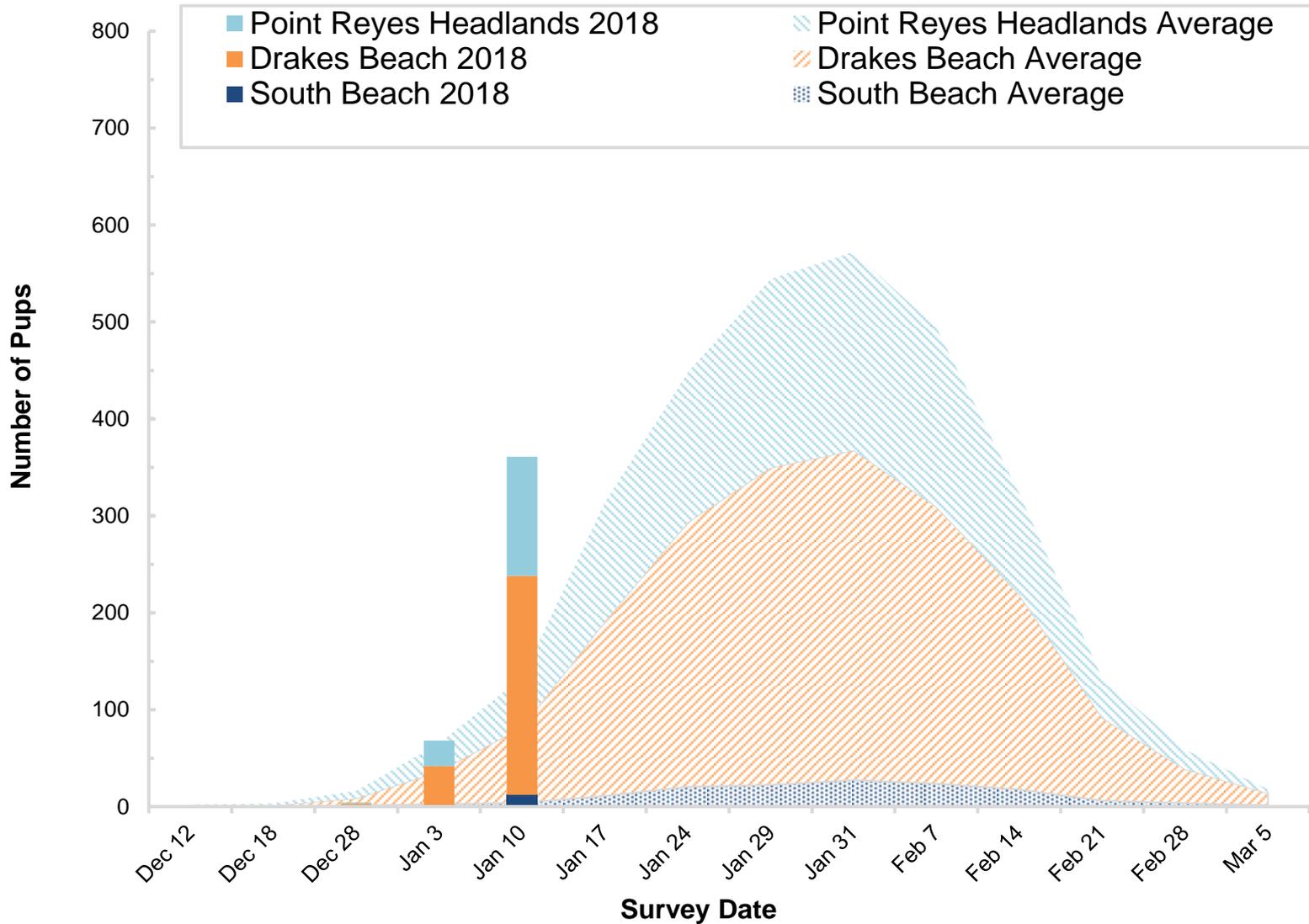


Northern Elephant Seals at Point Reyes National Seashore

Total 2018 Female Count vs. 2005-2017 Female Average



Northern Elephant Seals at Point Reyes National Seashore **Total 2018 Pup Count vs. 2005-2017 Pup Average**



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