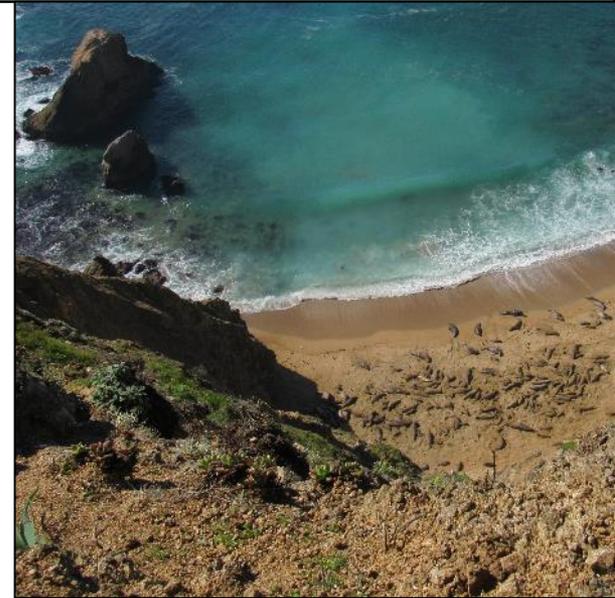


# National Park Service



## 2018 Elephant Seal Breeding Season Update February 9 2018



### News This Week:

- Pupping begins to decline.
- Cow departures increasing.
- Males are extremely active in their attempts to mate.

While a few pups were born this week, a large number of pups have been weaned as cows leave the beach. Mating activity is prevalent, and males are keeping busy either defending their harem or trying to sneak into one. D4 and D1 are still holding down alpha positions on Drakes Beach below the overlook.

**Above:** A view from above the Point Reyes Headlands Colony.

**Center:** Alpha male D4 keeps cool in the water, while defending his harem.

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

**Top:** Cow attempting to depart Drakes Beach, with a sub-adult male in pursuit.

**Bottom:** Female with just born pup, aggressively vocalizes at marauding seagulls.

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## Stay Cool

Unseasonably warm weather in Point Reyes has the elephant seals desperate to cool off. Researchers have observed changes in their behavior: entire harems are moving to the water's edge, cows are bringing their pups into the surf zone, and seals seek out standing water if they can. Sand flipping is rampant, and seals are also extending their flippers, which allows them to release heat.

**Top Left:** Harem on Drakes Beach at the water line.

**Top Right:** Cow and her pup taking a dip at Drakes.

**Bottom Left:** A pup extends her fore flipper to "dump" heat.

**Bottom Right:** Sub-adult male immerses himself in drainage pond at Drakes.



## Clap Back?



The vocalizations of male northern elephant seals, also called ‘clap threats’, are often heard at rookeries. Recent research out of UC Santa Cruz emphasizes the importance of these vocalizations in determining if males will engage in physical altercations. Clap threats of individual males have an acoustic signature, distinct for each individual. While alpha males will defend their harem against all subordinate male intruders, lower ranking males use these vocalizations to determine if a fight is worth the energy expenditure. The seals are able to recognize clap threats from individuals they have encountered before, remembering the signature of other seals even from previous years. If the vocalization they recognize is from a seal that dominated them in the past, the seals will avoid a fight they are likely to lose.

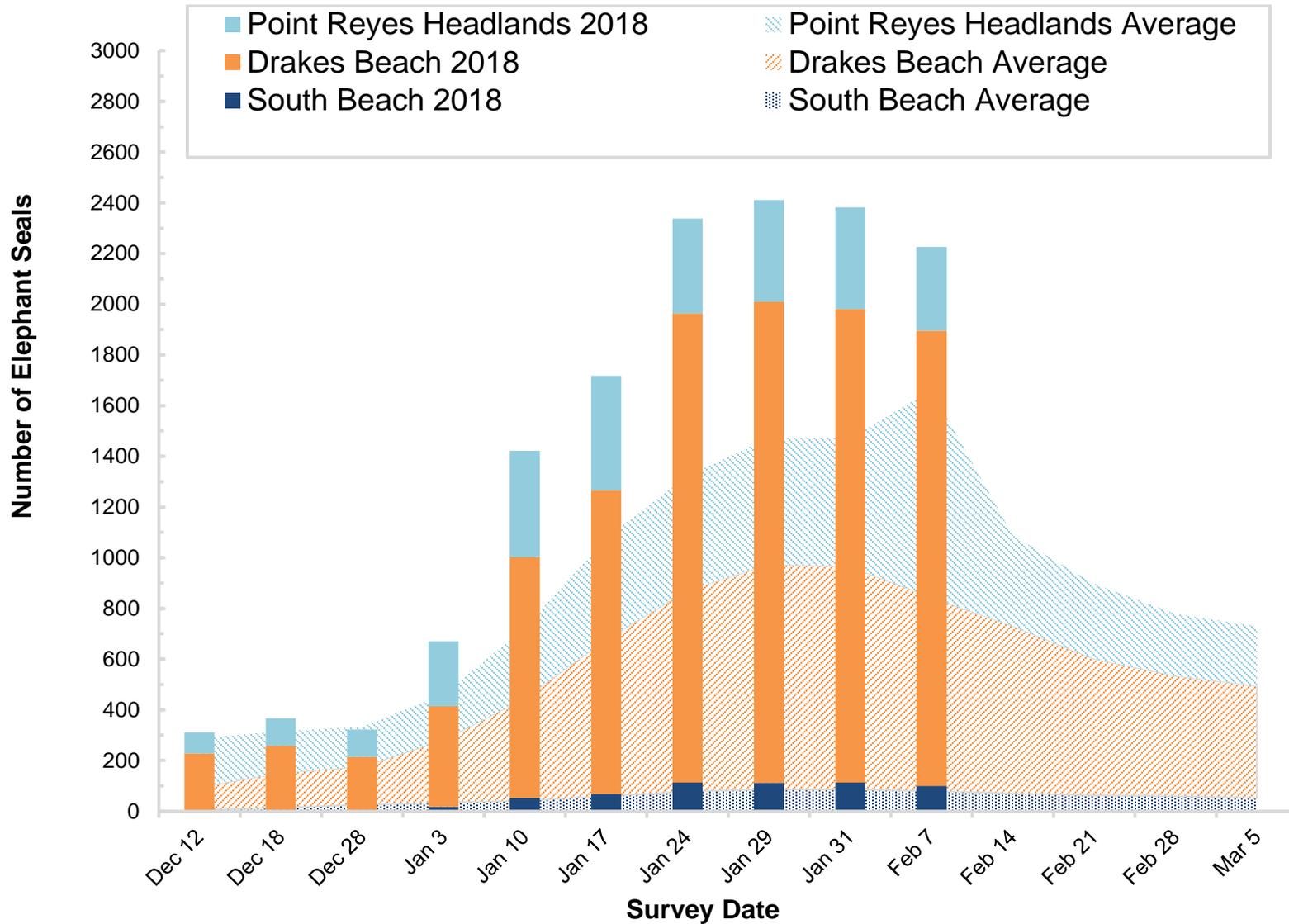
**Left:** Male elephant seal issuing a clap threat.

**Right:** Alpha male vocalizes at retreating subordinate male on Drakes Beach.

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

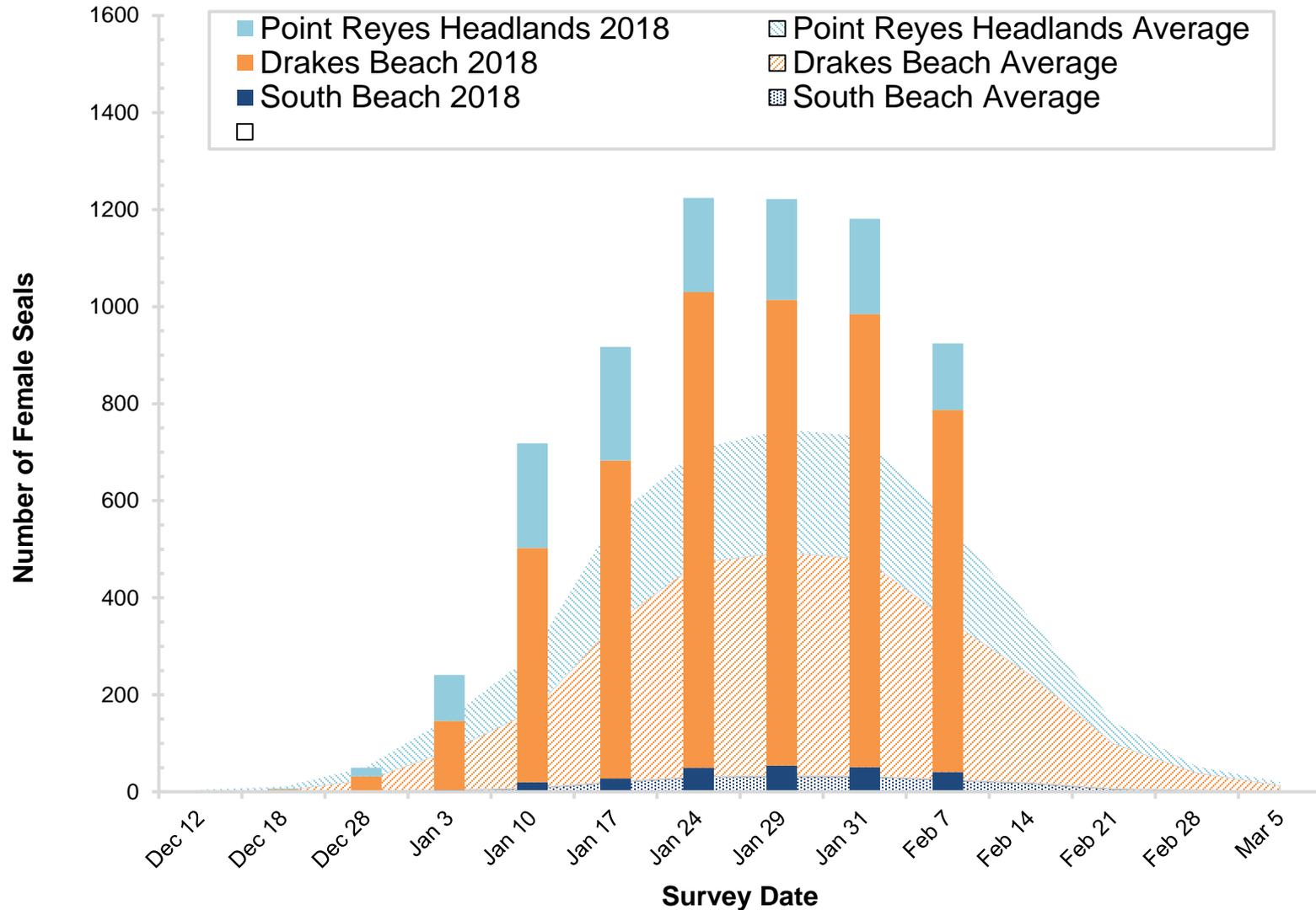
# Northern Elephant Seals at Point Reyes National Seashore

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



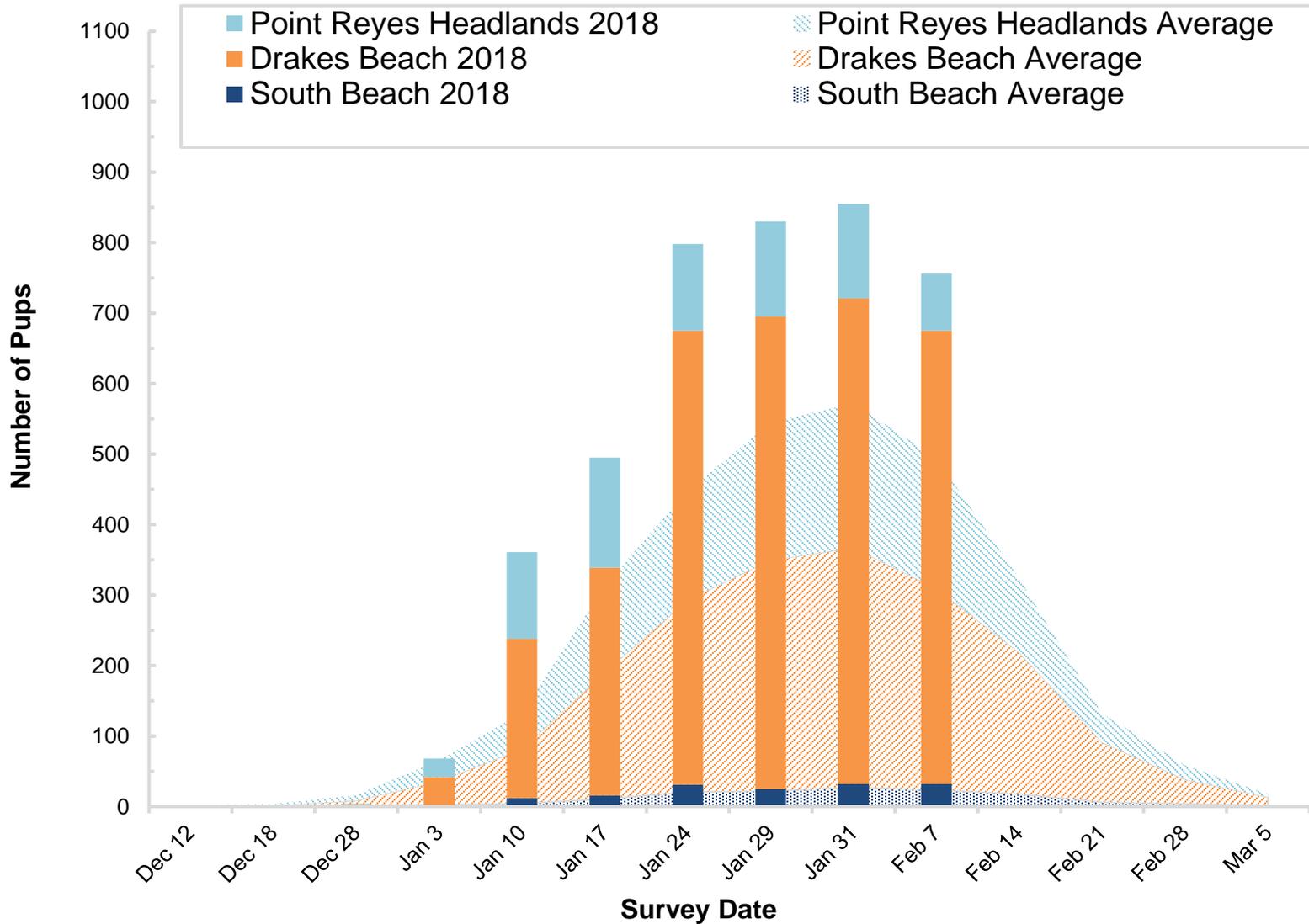
# Northern Elephant Seals at Point Reyes National Seashore

## Total 2018 Female Count vs. 2005-2017 Female Average



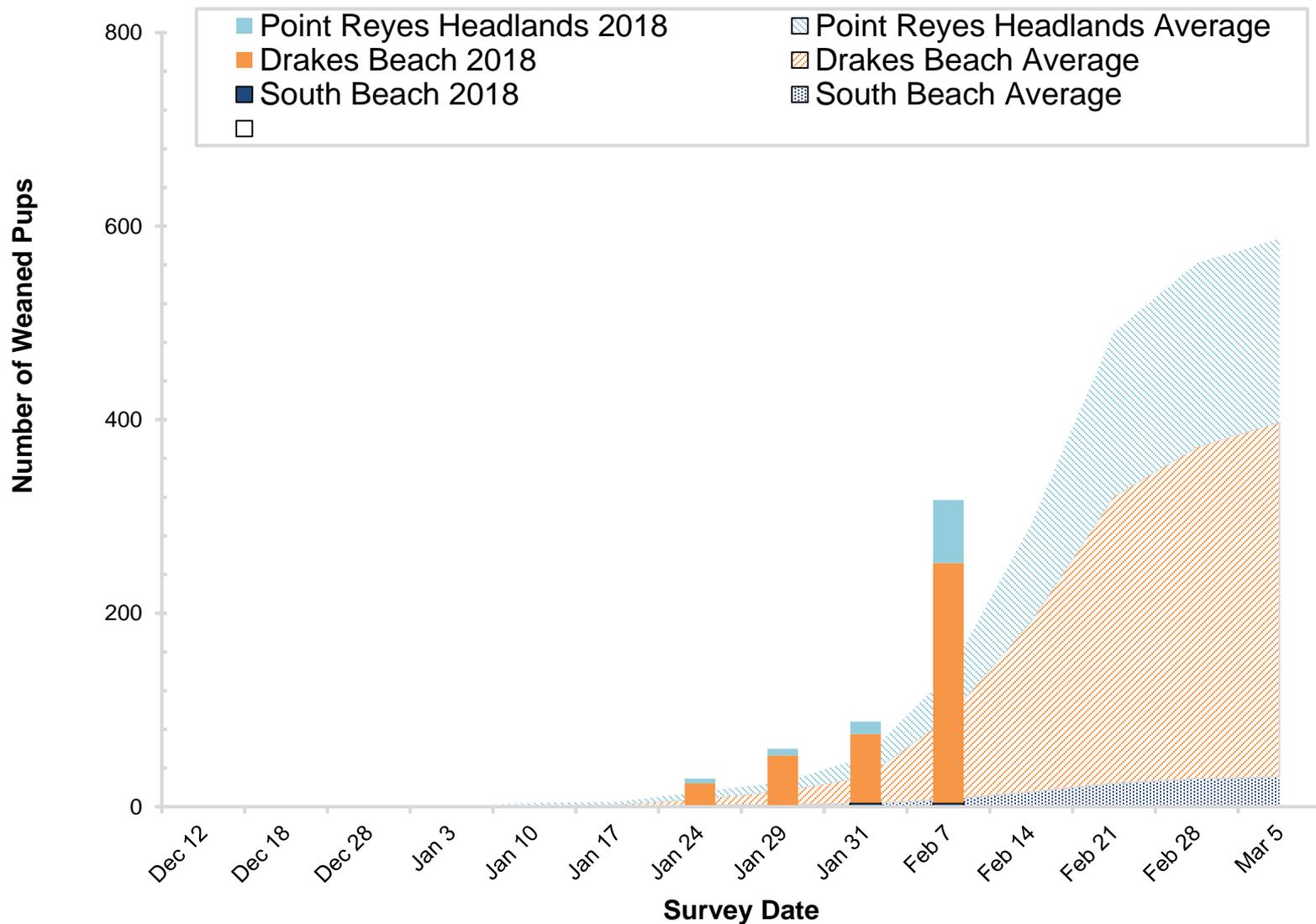
# Northern Elephant Seals at Point Reyes National Seashore

## Total 2018 Pup Count vs. 2005-2017 Pup Average



# Northern Elephant Seals at Point Reyes National Seashore

## Total 2018 Weaned Pup Count vs. 2005-2017 Weaned Pup Average



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