

National Park Service



2018 Elephant Seal Breeding Season Update February 23, 2018



News This Week:

- Majority of cows have bid farewell to their pups, and departed for the open ocean.
- Very low pup mortality this season means the beaches are filling up with weaned pups.
- Males are desperate to mate, as only a few females are left.

Above: A squabble erupts between two sub-adult males.

Center: A cow and pup at the waterline.

Top Left: A gorgeous molted weaner displays his neck rolls

Bottom Left: A weaner pod begins to form in the sand.



Pup Protectors



Above:
Two females in an aggressive display

Right: An unhappy cow vocalizes at her neighbor.



As cows leave the beaches of Point Reyes, a marker of their success this season is to leave behind a fat and healthy pup. The mother's physical condition, and her ability to provide nourishment are of course important factors in successful weaning. However, the female's behavior and ability to defend her pup are important for her pup's survival as well. More dominant and aggressive cows are more successful at defending their pups against the bites of other females or males in the harem. Dominance also allows a cow to secure the choicest spot in the harem, often in the center of the group, where she can avoid subordinate males, rising tides, and other disturbances that could harm her pup. Older females are aggressive more frequently, and therefore more likely to hold a higher rank in the harem.

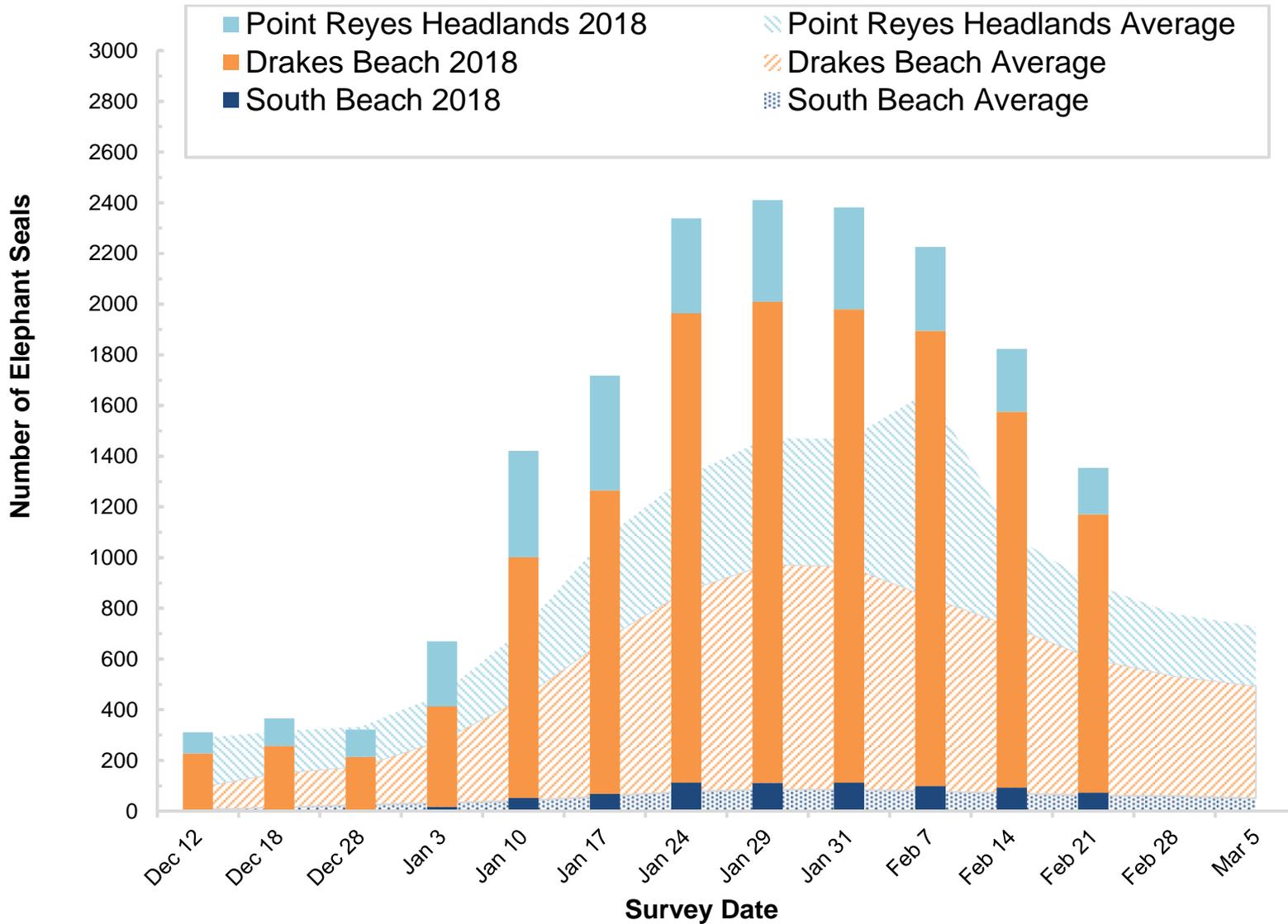
Marvelous Males



Impressive displays of stamina are on display below the Drakes Beach overlook. Alpha males D1 and D4 are still dominating, as they have since the very beginning of breeding season. D4 has been observed aggressively defending his harem against subordinate males. D1 has the largest harem on this stretch of beach, and his presence alone seems enough to keep other males away, but who knows what he's up to when humans aren't watching. Another amazing alpha, D2, has been harem master in Gus' Cove (near Chimney Rock) the entire season, at the height of the season defending a harem of over 150 cows!

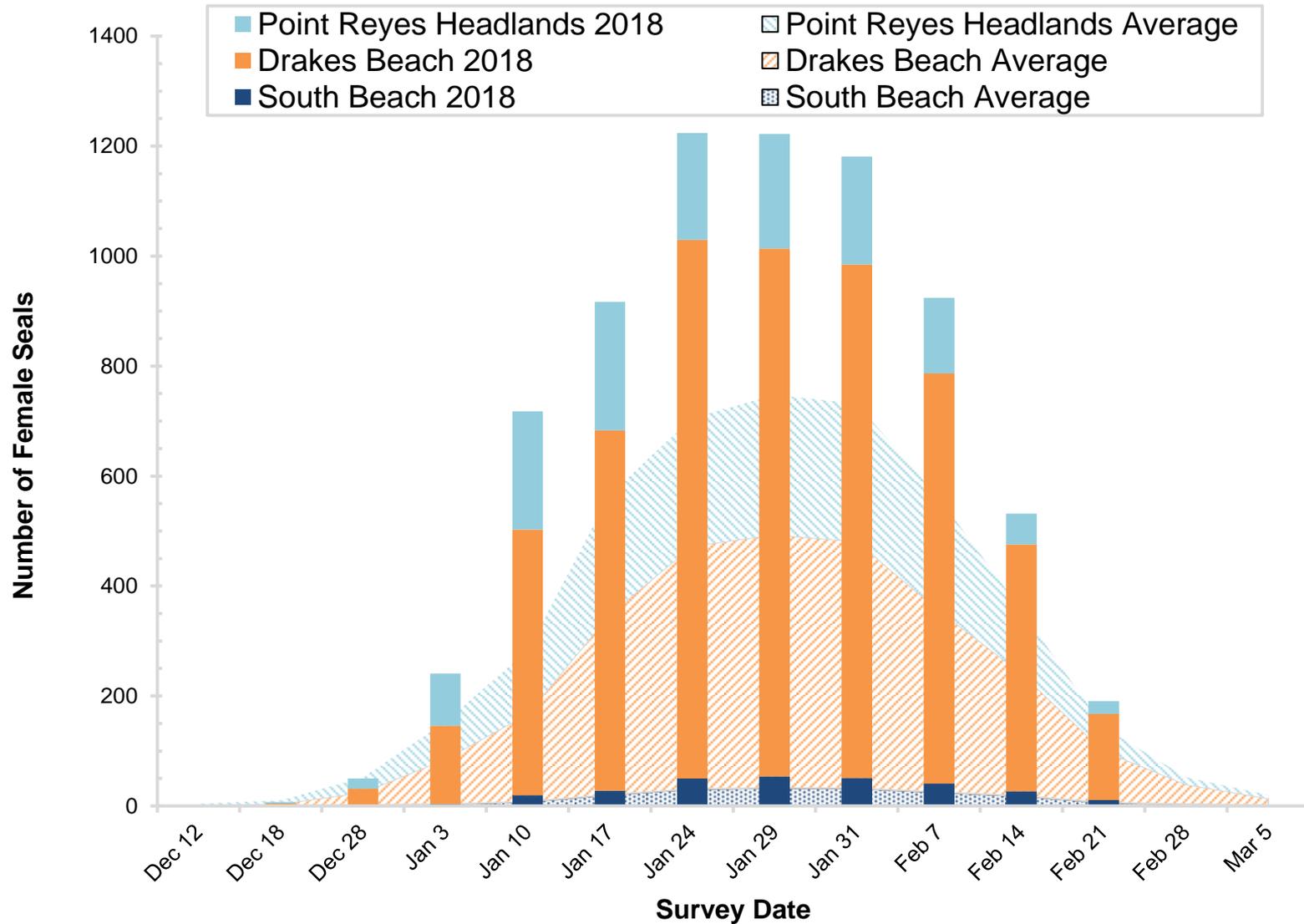
Northern Elephant Seals at Point Reyes National Seashore

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



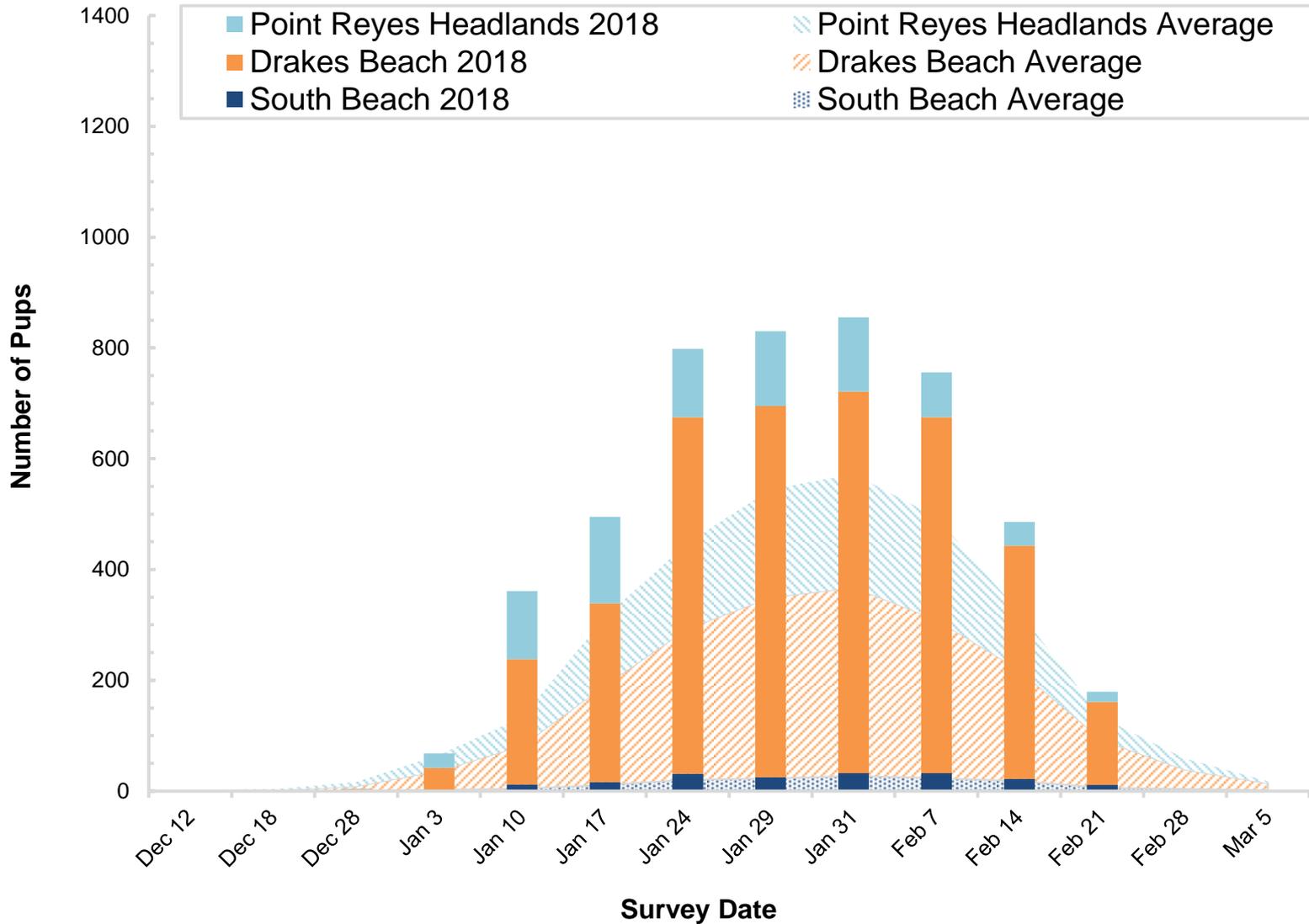
Northern Elephant Seals at Point Reyes National Seashore

Total 2018 Female Count vs. 2005-2017 Female Average



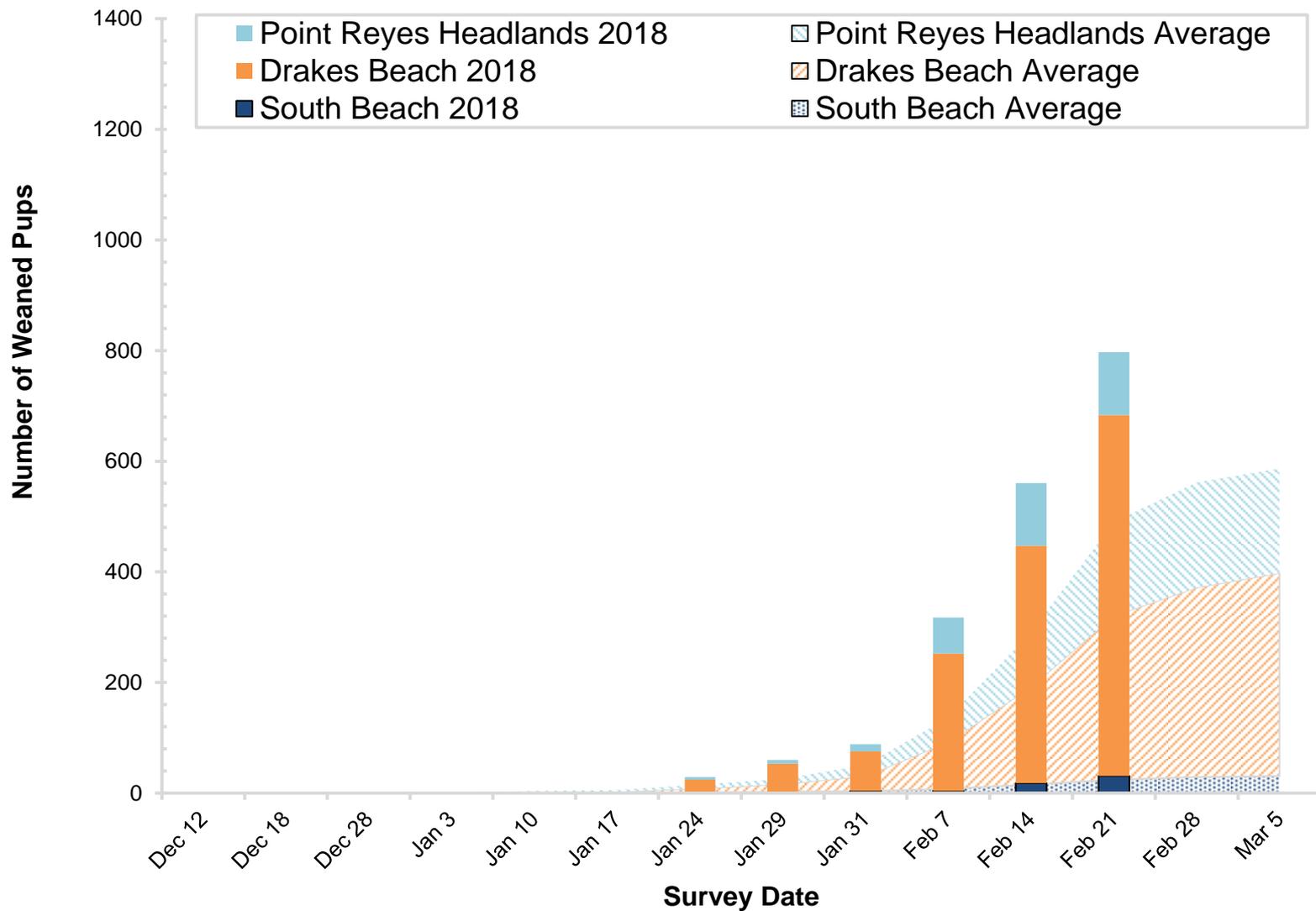
Northern Elephant Seals at Point Reyes National Seashore

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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