

# National Park Service



## 2019 Elephant Seal Breeding Season Update February 2, 2019



### News this week:

- We are back in action, and resuming bi-weekly surveys when possible!
- Numbers are potentially at peak level, but we will have to wait for next week's counts to determine the peak.
- The entirety of Drakes Beach is closed until further notice.

**Above:** A nice fat pup with mom.

**Center:** Large bull with battle scars, takes some time for himself.

**Top Left:** A view of the Drakes Beach colony near the overlook.

**Bottom Left:** The new and improved pup pillow 2019!

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

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## KPVC SEALEBRITIES



**Above:** Drakes Beach colony from the Ken Patrick Visitor Center parking lot

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

Our Point Reyes elephant seals are no longer just local heroes, they have been making headlines all over the country for their spectacular (possibly shutdown inspired) take-over of Drakes Beach at Ken Patrick Visitor Center. As of January 31 there were 53 cows and 52 pups! Last year no pups were born on this section of beach, and in 2017 only 3 pups were born here. The road to Drakes Beach will be closed on weekdays, and open 9-5 on weekends, with no beach access. It is important to remember that human disturbance to the seals can interrupt nursing, and could even lead to cow and pup separation.

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## FAQ!

**How much do they weigh?** Northern elephant seal adult males can weigh up to 5000 lbs. and adult females up to 1500 lbs.

**For how long do the pups nurse?** Pups nurse for approximately 28 days, at which point mom will mate and leave for the open ocean.

**How many pups are born to a cow?** Only one pup per female, although twin births have been documented in Southern elephant seals.

**How long do they live?** Typically 10-19 years. Males tend to have a shorter lifespan than females, because of the enormous energy expenditure required to fight and mate.

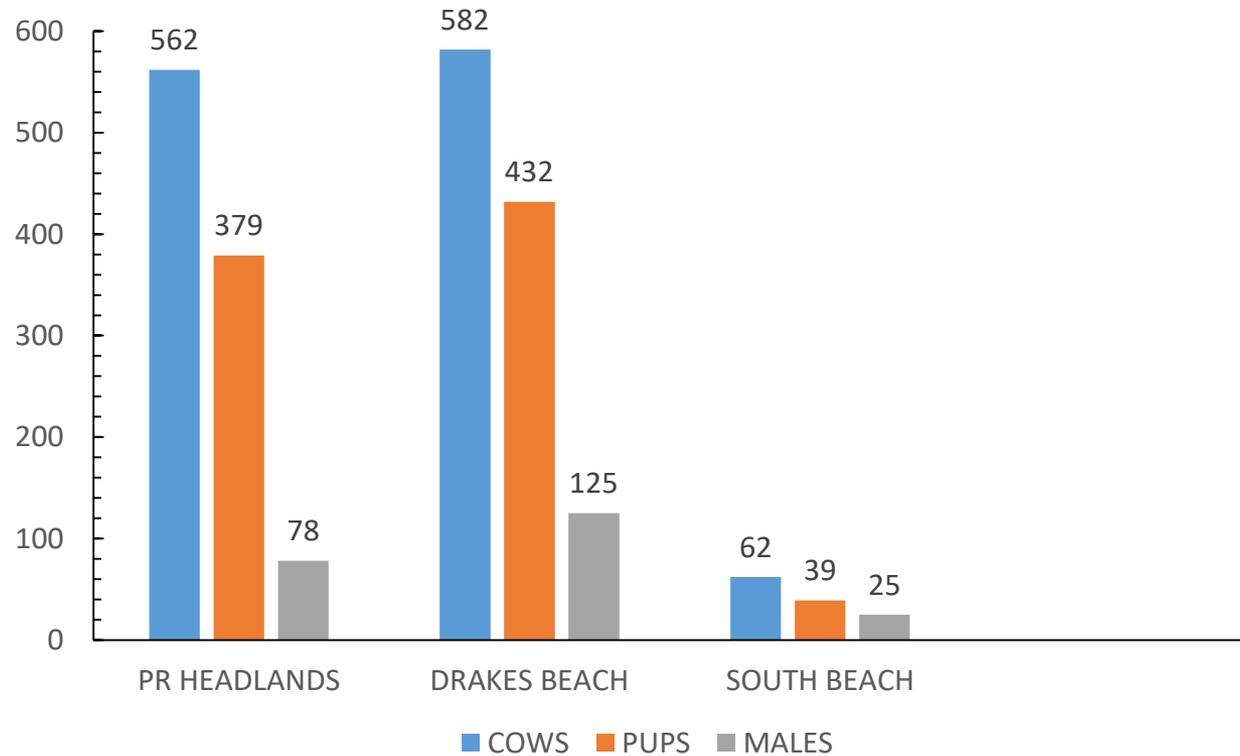
**What do they eat?** They eat deep-water creatures such as fish, squid, and small sharks. Recent research has uncovered new information on female's feeding habits (stay tuned!).

**Why do they make so much noise?** Female to pup vocalization are an important bonding tool and help mom find her pup if separation occurs. Adult seals (male and female) use much different vocalizations to display aggression. In females, aggression plays an important role in keeping her pup safe from other seals, and males use aggressive vocal displays to establish dominance in lieu of a physical altercation.

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Elephant Seal Numbers As of 01/28/2019



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