

# National Park Service



## 2024 Elephant Seal Breeding Season Update February 16, 2024

### News this week:

- Mating is ramping up! Males have been vocalizing, chasing, and fighting each other in front of Ken Patrick Visitor Center.
- Biologists are tagging weaned pups, including the ones at Ken Patrick Visitor Center. Keep an eye out for the pink flipper tags, starting with an 'X'!
- There are a total of 388 weanlings in the park as of 2/15/24.
- The total elephant seal count in the park continues to be below the 5-year average.



**Above:** While on the beach, weanlings molt their black coat, revealing a sleek, silver-grey coat.

**Center:** Some of the last pregnant cows of the season were spotted this week. Cow numbers continue to drop as they leave for the open ocean after weaning their pup.

**Top Left:** Weanling pods are beginning to form on the edges of the harems. The bulk of the weanlings are currently farther down on Drakes Beach. The count on 2/15 was 256 weanlings on Drakes Beach.

**Bottom Left:** A cove termed 'Main Colony' on the Point Reyes Headlands. This was where the first elephant seal pup of Point Reyes was born! This cove is impacted by storms coming from the south.





## Weanling Facts

- Cows nurse their pups for about 28 days and then depart. It is up to the weanlings to learn how to swim, forage, hold their breath, and navigate on their upcoming foraging trip.
- On their first trip at sea, weanlings will dive long, deep, and continuously, spending most of the time submerged in the ocean.

Using tracking technology on weanlings, a study at UC Santa Cruz found that:

- Within a few days of departure to the ocean, weanlings reached depths of 300 ft in their dives. Within 30 days, they reached around 850 ft.
- On the first day at sea, weanlings can dive for up to 11 minutes. By the end of their trip, it's around 20 mins – similar to an adult female.

Upon return from their first trip at sea:

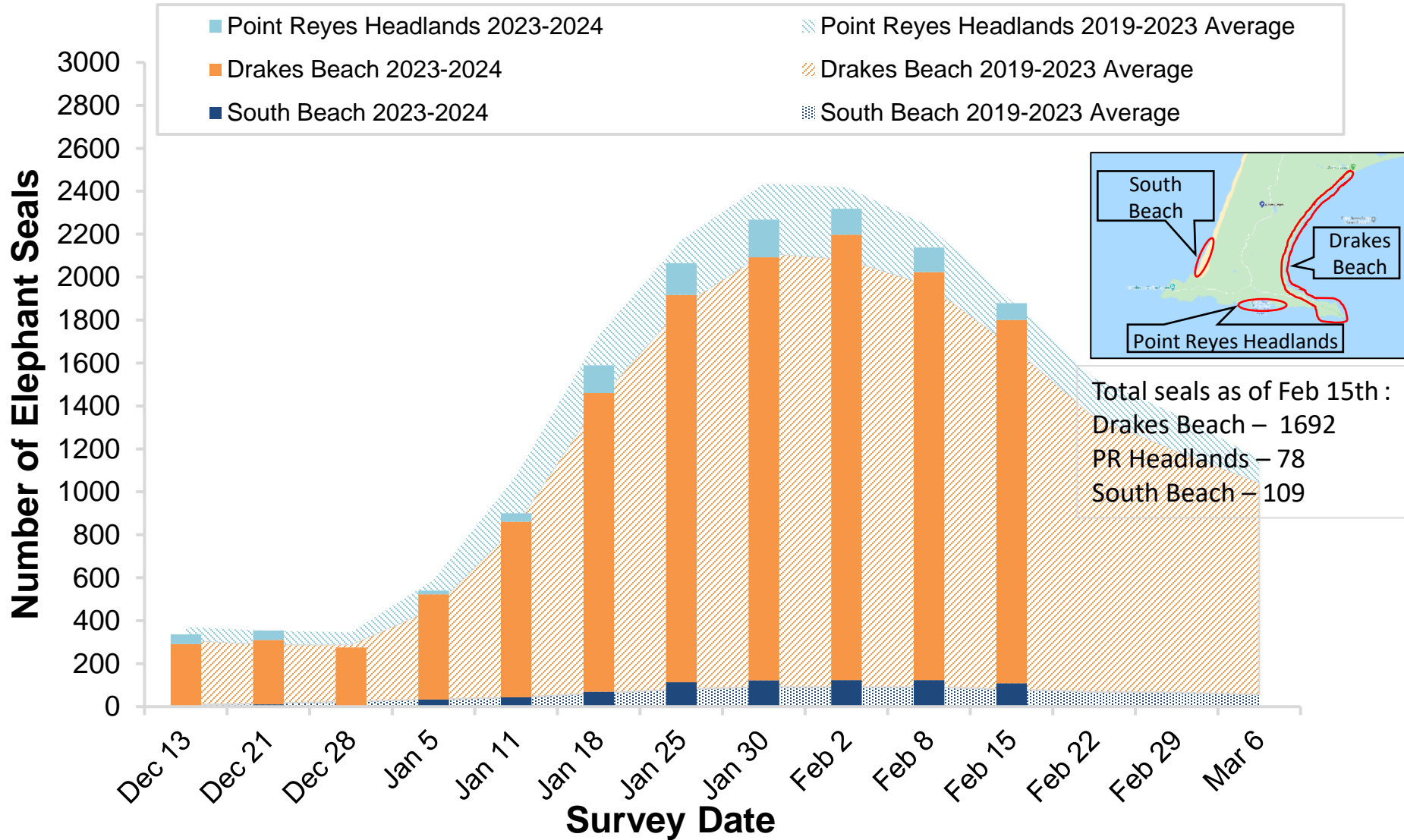
- Weanlings return at around the same mass as their departure but with significant fat loss of up to 41%.



**Above:** Weanlings laying around!  
Photos by A.Goldston. NMFS Permit No. 21425

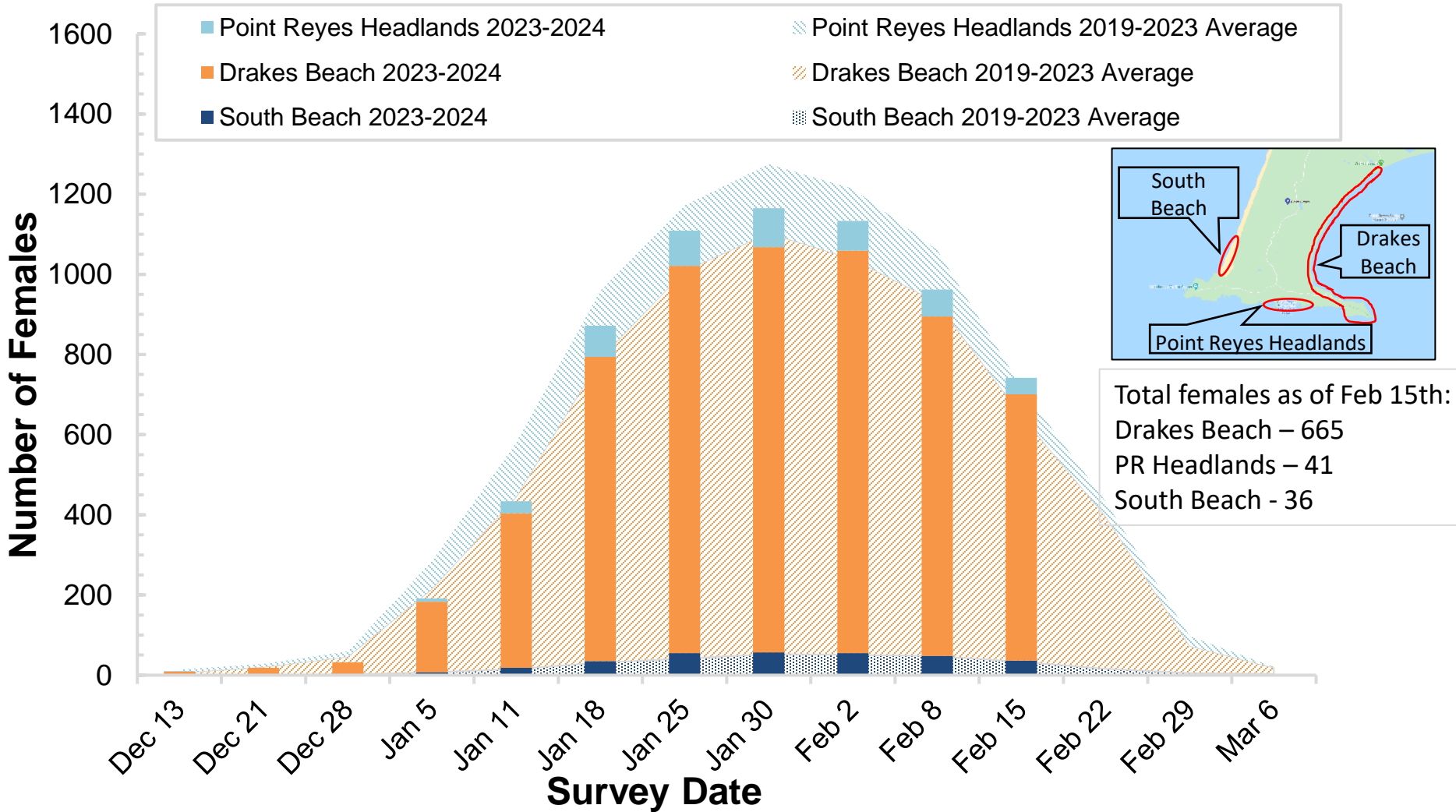
# Northern Elephant Seals at Point Reyes National Seashore

## Total 2024 Seal Count vs. 2019-2023 Total Seal Average



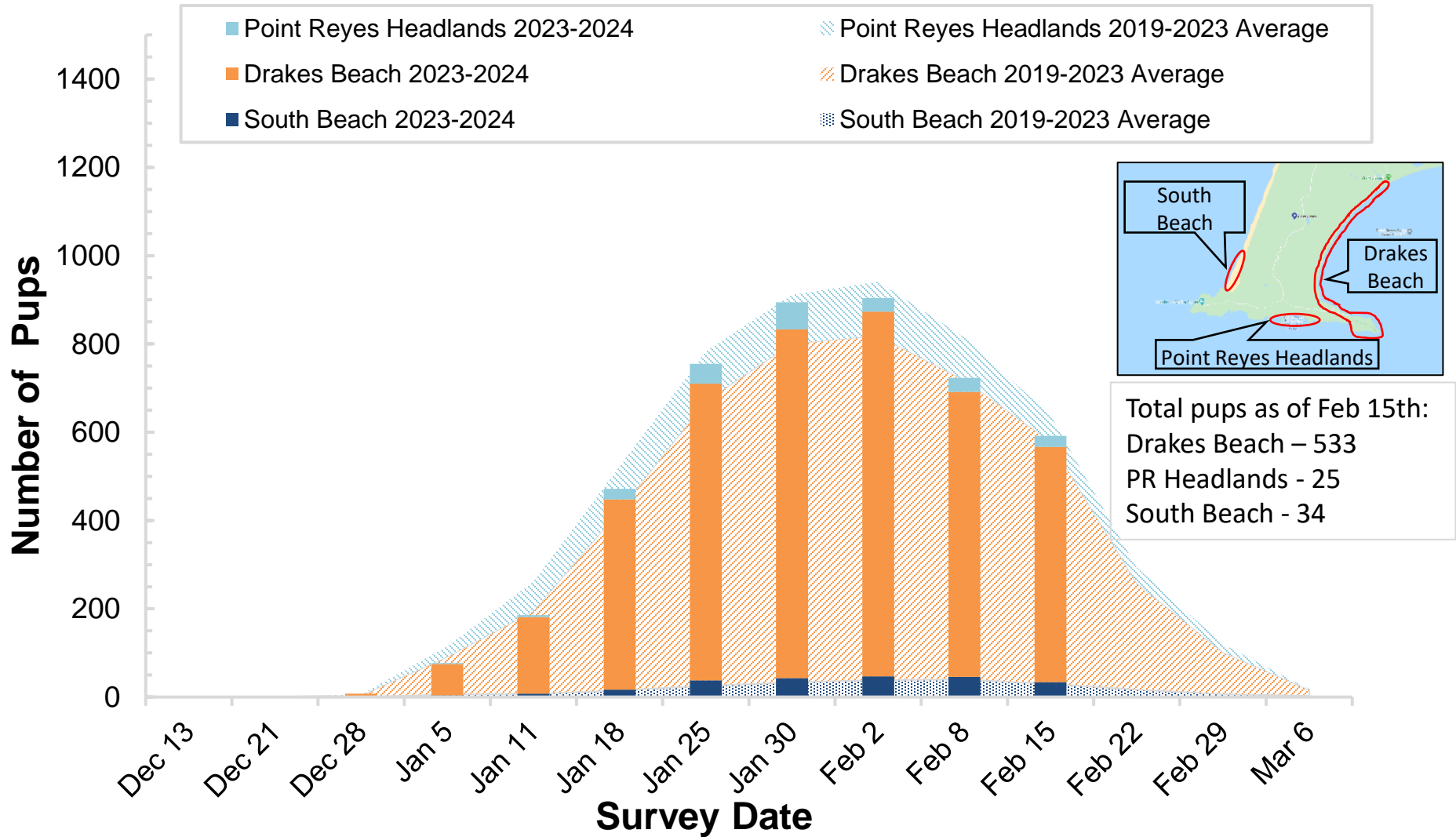
# Northern Elephant Seals at Point Reyes National Seashore

## Total 2024 Female Count vs. 2019-2023 Female Average



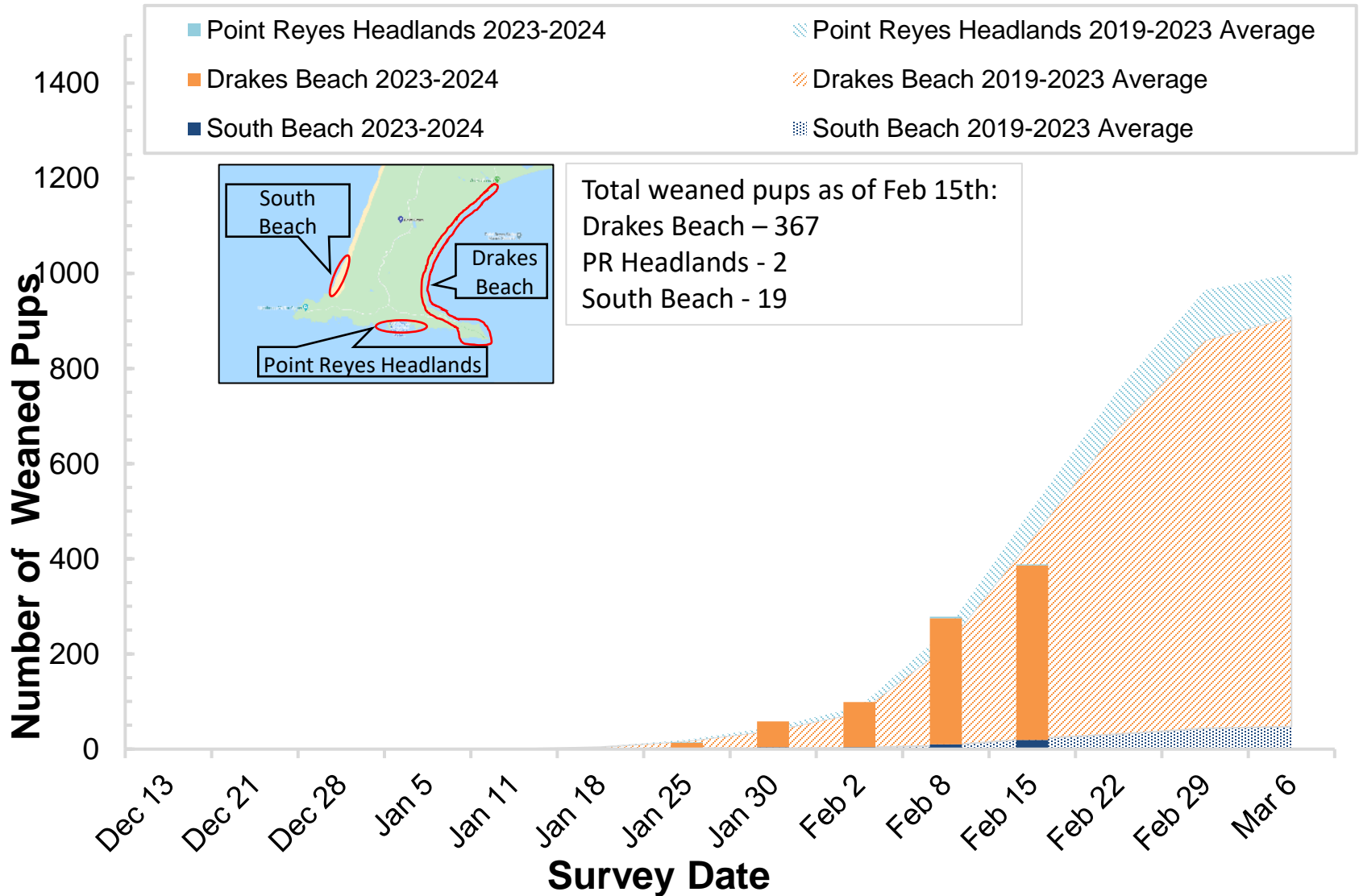
# Northern Elephant Seals at Point Reyes National Seashore

## Total 2024 Pup Count vs. 2019-2023 Pup Average



# Northern Elephant Seals at Point Reyes National Seashore

## Total 2024 Weaned Pup Count vs. 2019-2023 Weaned Pup Average



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