

**Northern Elephant Seals at Piedras Blancas:
A Brief 2018 Breeding Season Summary
B. Hatfield**

The number of adult females counted at the rookery (and therefore the number of estimated births) this breeding season was higher than last season by about 250 animals, resulting in an estimate of the number of births being up approximately 4% from last year (to roughly 5,800). The number of live seals that were born this season (including suckling, weaned, and orphaned pups) counted at the end of the season was up 7% from last year to approximately 5,400 (Figure 1). The difference between the number of estimated births and the number of live pups/weaners/orphans indicates that mortality was down from approximately 10% last year to about 8% this year – likely a result of the relatively mild winter in terms of large wave events coinciding with high tides.

The pupping distribution along the coast was similar to recent years. The increase in pup production seen this year was due to more seals in the southern coastal segments from VP-3 to south of Arroyo Laguna. An increase of over 200 pups, weaned and orphaned seals were counted at VP-3 compared to last year, while almost 200 more were counted at Arroyo Laguna and south. The area north of VP-3 to the lighthouse had slightly fewer births, while the number on the beaches north of the lighthouse were essentially the same as last year (Figure 2). For the fourth consecutive year a few pups were born on the Arroyo de la Cruz beach and, again this year, there were pups born in a small cove north of Point San Simeon. Pups have not been born south of Pt. San Simeon since 2014.

Figure 1. Live Pup, Weaned and Orphaned Seal Counts at end of season, Piedras Blancas, 2007 - 2018

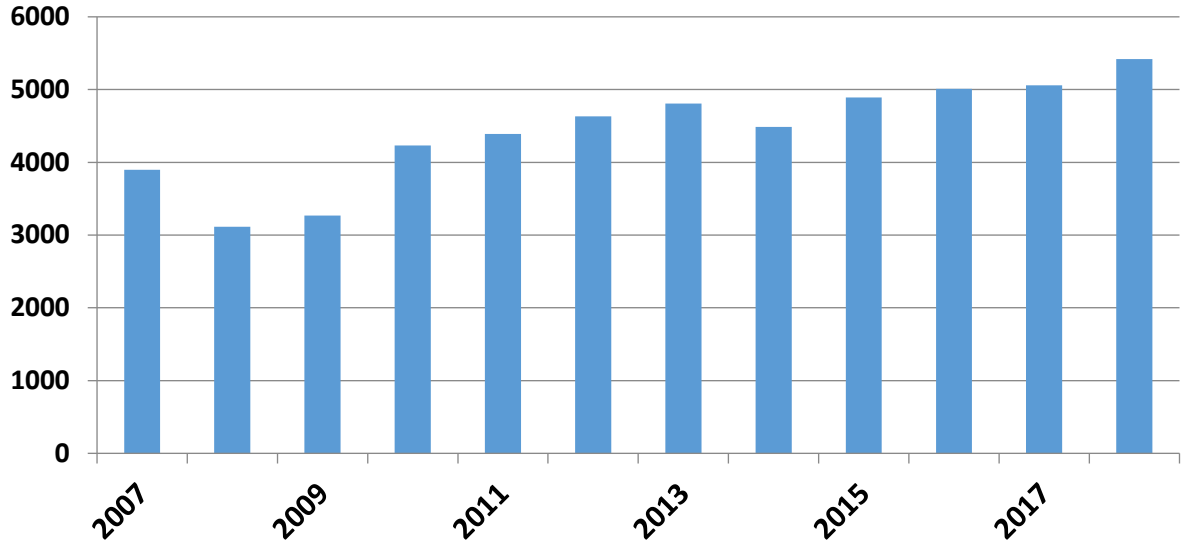
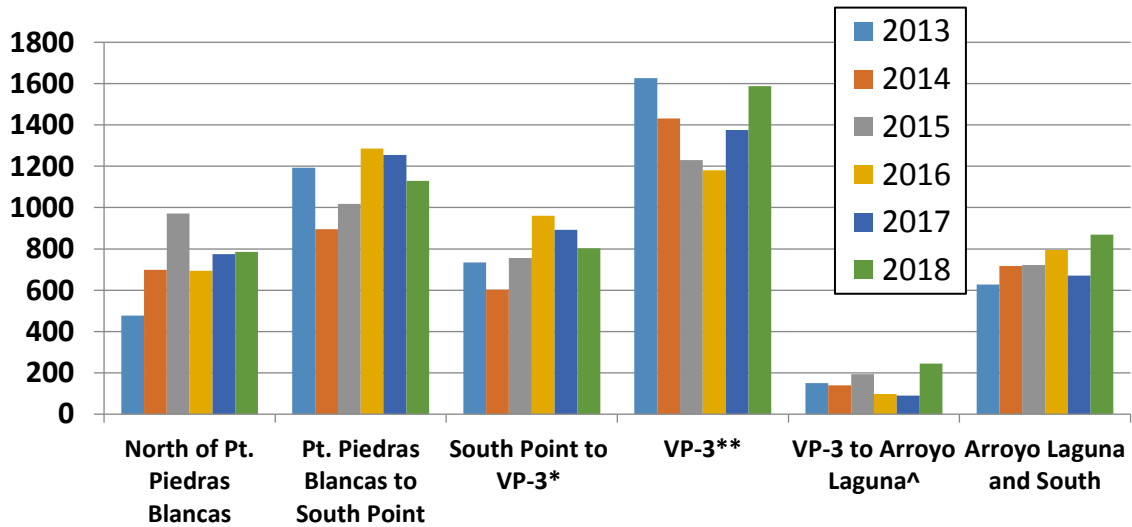


Figure 2. Live Pup and Weaned Seal Counts at Piedras Blancas, By Area (Late February/Early March)



* does not include VP-3 ** includes cove just south of dunes ^ does not include beach at Arroyo Laguna