

Annual Cycle of Elephant Seal Activity at Año Nuevo

January - Elephant seal births really start happening. The maximum number of births per day usually occurs about the third week of January. Births can occur into the first part of March.

February – A female's breeding season visit to Año Nuevo is usually five weeks, in which she gives birth, nurses for four weeks, mates, and returns to the sea to feed. The maximum number of matings per day usually occurs about Valentines' Day.

March – The births are usually complete and the females have left their pups (weaners) to fend for themselves. Weaners form pods for safety from the medium and large males. The weaners learn Swimming 101 in the fresh water ponds and progress to Swimming 102 in the ocean – all without instruction from adults!

April – The females who gave birth earliest return to molt their entire year-old layer of fur. Since it's too cold to molt in the ocean, each elephant seal travels to the relative warmth on land. Each elephant seal spends 5-6 weeks to complete the molting process.

May – Females that gave birth later in the breeding season return to molt.

June – A transition month in which the last of the adult females and the first of the adult males arrive to molt.

July and August – Adult males arrive to molt.

September, October, and November – Juveniles arrive to haul out for 5-6 weeks. Most of an elephant seal's life is in the relatively weightless ocean environment, so the gravity on the beaches during the haul-out is necessary for the juveniles to build strong bones. Adults are on land during their breeding and molting seasons, and their bone mass increases significantly during those times.

November and December – In mid- to late-November, large breeding-aged males arrive to establish harem areas. The alpha bulls fight with each other to secure the best locations on the beaches. Pregnant females start to arrive at the end of the month. The first births usually occur in the first ten days of December. The females like to hide in the safety of the willows. For this reason, the reserve is closed to the public December 1 to 15.