

SAVE THE BAY'S 2019 Rhode Island Seal Report

VOLUME I, ISSUE III
FEBRUARY 2020

Rhode Island Seals

The harbor seal is the State Marine Mammal of Rhode Island and one of the most charismatic residents of Narragansett Bay. Speckled tan or gray with large dark eyes and weighing 175-250 pounds, these seals migrate south from Maine and the Atlantic Provinces of Canada in the fall. Warm, sheltered waters and abundant food provide a winter haven for these animals. Although harbor seals are the most common seal in Rhode Island, gray, harp, and hooded seals are occasionally sighted as well.

Seal Monitoring

To better understand the habits and numbers of seals in Narragansett Bay, Save The Bay staff and volunteers began monitoring seals in 1994. Monitoring consists of regular volunteer observations at known haul-out sites throughout the seal season. Since 2009, an annual Bay-Wide Seal Count has been held on a single day near the peak of the season when all haul-out sites are visited at low tide. In 2019, in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, volunteers began monitoring seals on Block Island, as well.

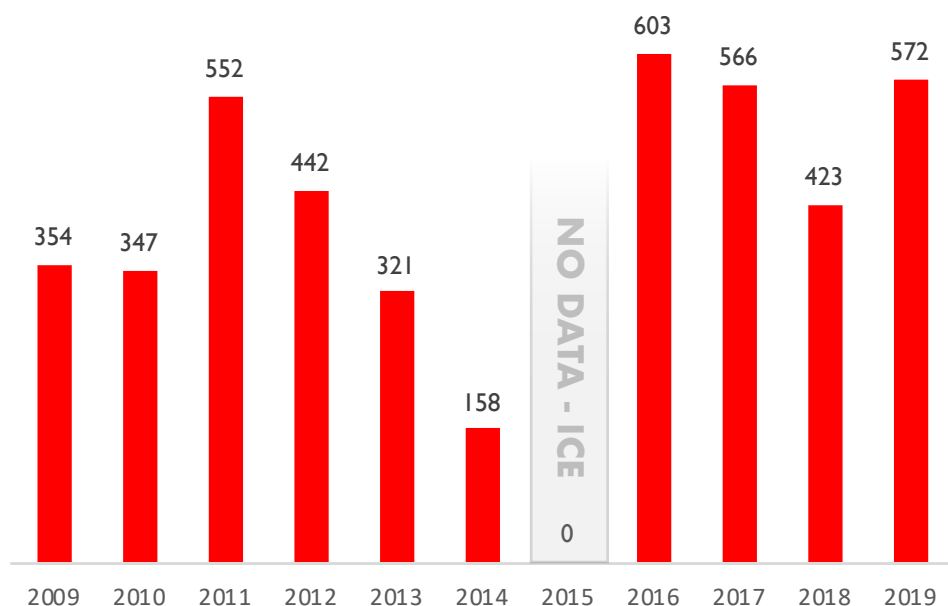
572 SEALS COUNTED IN 2018-19 SEASON

The 2018-2019 Rhode Island seal monitoring season was an exciting one, with the introduction of a seal monitoring program on Block Island in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, and with 572 seals recorded on the Narragansett Bay-Wide Count – the second highest total in the survey's history.

Continued on Page 2.

BAY-WIDE SEAL COUNT

■ Sum of Total Number of Seals Seen



About Citizen Science Data

The Narragansett Bay Seal Monitoring Program is a volunteer effort to observe and better understand local seal populations. The project is designed to provide useful observations from the general public, and it is not a formal scientific study.

For more information on Save The Bay's seal monitoring program and data, contact Save The Bay's Volunteer Manager, July Lewis, at jlewis@savebay.org.

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572 SEALS...

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Block Island is a winter home to many seals, and in 2019, The Nature Conservancy's Kimberly Gaffett reached out to Save The Bay and offered to start a monitoring program using the same protocol as the Narragansett Bay Seal Count, with its own "Island-Wide Count" on the same day as the Bay-Wide Count. Results were excellent, with many local volunteers observing and reporting on Block Island seals. As in Narragansett Bay, most are harbor seals, but gray seals were regularly sighted as well. On March 19, during the Block Island-Wide Count, 47 seals were observed, including 2 gray seals. However, interestingly, the highest number of seals for the season was observed on February 4. On that day 98, seals were observed at Pebbly Beach on a calm day with ideal conditions.

During the Narragansett Bay-Wide Seal Count, volunteers observed 572 harbor seals throughout Narragansett Bay. Excellent viewing conditions contributed to the high count. Weather was partly sunny with temperatures of 40-50 degrees and winds that started calm and increased throughout the day. See complete results on page 4.

The Rhode Island Seal Count is an annual effort coordinated by Save The Bay in collaboration with the EPA's Atlantic Ecology Division, Narragansett Bay Estuarine Re-



search Reserve, and the Nature Conservancy.

HAUL-OUT SITES AROUND RHODE ISLAND

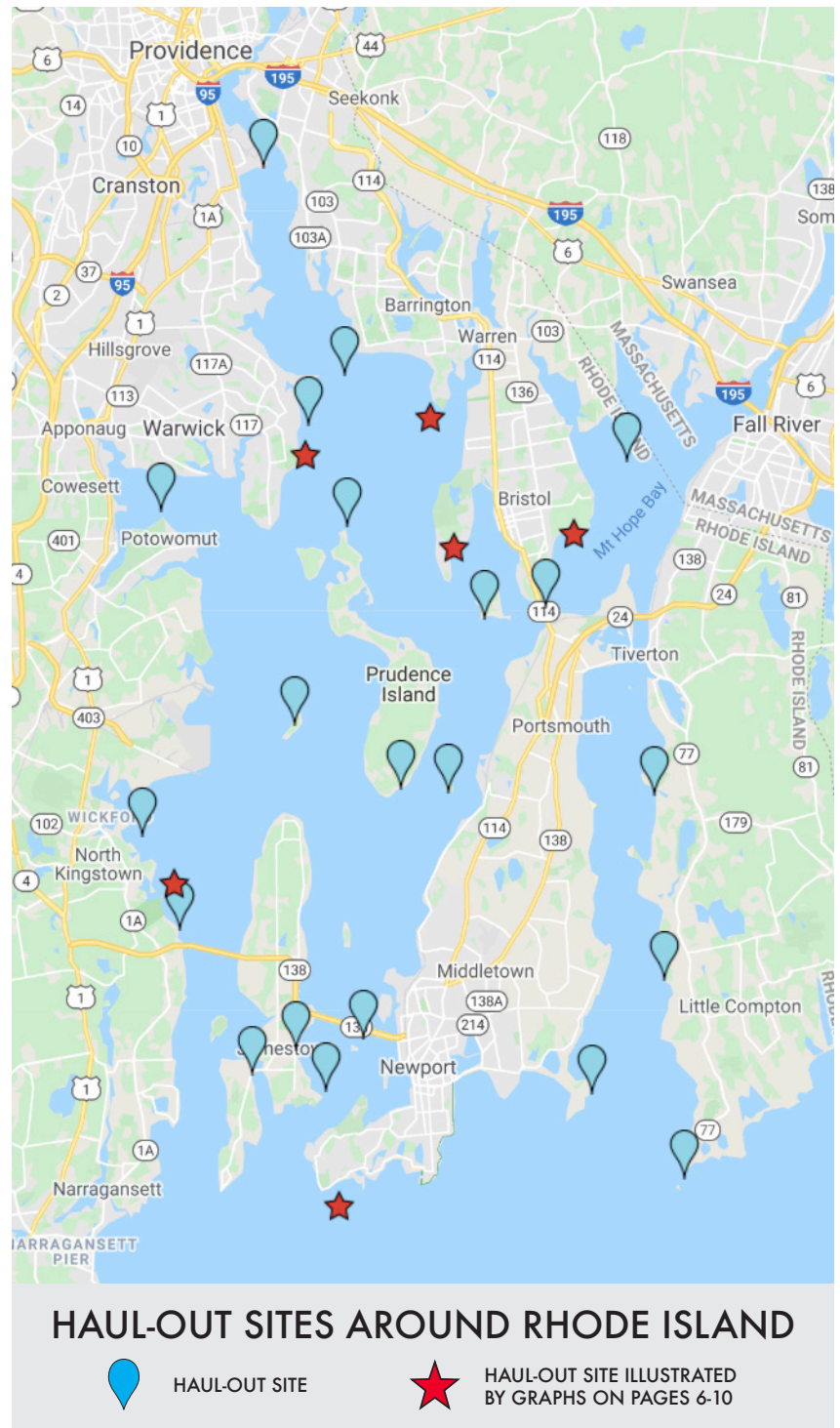
Harbor seals are seen from the mouth of the Bay at Brenton Point to as far north as Providence. Seals “haul out” on rocks for a variety of possible reasons, including regulating body temperature and rest.

Haul-out sites are variable in terms of their use by seals. Some are only occasionally visited, while others regularly have over 100 seals present at low tide. Others may be well-used, but difficult for volunteers to access.

The graphs on pages 6-8 represent haul-out sites that are regularly used by large numbers of seals and regularly monitored by volunteers. Frequent, repeated observations at these sites help illustrate the seal season in Narragansett Bay, answering the following questions:

When do they arrive and when do they leave? When is the peak of seal population in the Bay?

The data indicates that the highest numbers are usually seen in late March.



BAY-WIDE SEAL COUNT RESULTS

Tuesday, March 19, 2019 | Low Tide: 1:10 p.m. | Temperature: 40-50°F | Weather: Partly Sunny
Winds: 0-4 on the Beaufort scale with 2 being most frequently reported

MONITORING SITE	# OF HAULED-OUT SEALS	# OF SEALS IN THE WATER	TOTAL # OF SEALS SEEN
Barren Ledge	0	0	0
Brenton Point	111	0	111
Church Cove	26	0	26
Citing Rock	95	0	95
Coddington Cove	40	0	40
Coldspring Rock	15	0	15
Dyer Island	0	0	0
Field's Point	0	0	0
Green Point	0	0	0
Halfway Rock	20	0	20
Hog Island	0	1	1
Hope Island	44	0	44
Mackerel Cove	0	0	0
Park Dock	0	0	0
Providence Point	3	0	3
Prudence Island T-Wharf	58	0	58
Rocky Point	12	0	12
Rome Point	99	0	99
Rumstick	0	0	0
Sachuest	0	0	0
Sakonnet Point	33	0	33
Sally Rock	0	0	0
Seapowet Rock	0	0	0
Spar Island	1	0	1
Usher Cove	14	0	14
		TOTAL:	572

BLOCK ISLAND-WIDE COUNT

Tuesday, March 19, 2019 | Low Tide: 1:28 p.m. | Temperature: 38-43°F | Weather: Mostly Sunny
Winds: 1-5 on the Beaufort scale with 2 being most frequently reported

MONITORING SITE	# OF HAULED-OUT SEALS	# OF SEALS IN THE WATER	TOTAL # OF SEALS SEEN
Clay Head South	5	1	6
Clay Head North	0	0	0
Crescent Beach	0	0	0
Pebbly Beach	23	2	25
West Beach & Beane Point	0	0	0
Gracies Cove	0	0	0
Cormorant Cove	13	2	15
Cooneymus	0	0	0
Settlers Rock	1	0	1
		TOTAL:	47

NOTE: TOTAL INCLUDES 45 HARBOR SEALS, 2 GRAY SEALS.



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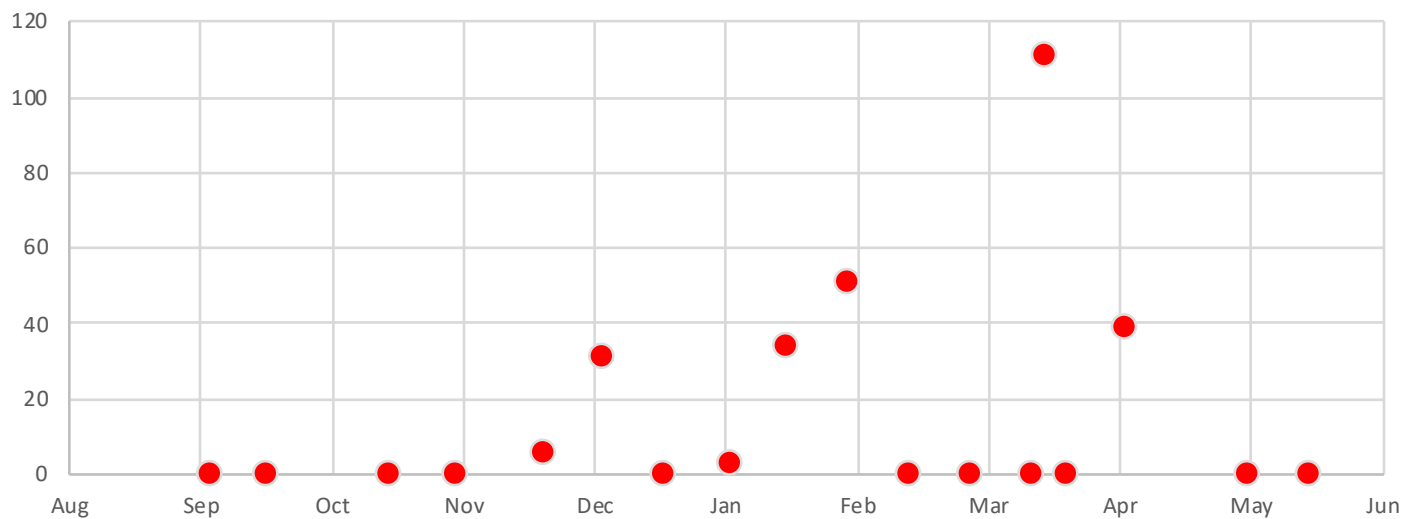
SEASONAL SEAL MONITORING

The following graphs illustrate the numbers of seals sighted at specific Narragansett Bay haul out sites throughout the 2018-2019 seal season. These scatter graphs make it easy to see the “shape” of the seal season, with seals beginning to arrive in the fall, peaking in March, and dropping off sharply in April.

BRENTON POINT, NEWPORT

2018-2019 SEAL OBSERVATIONS

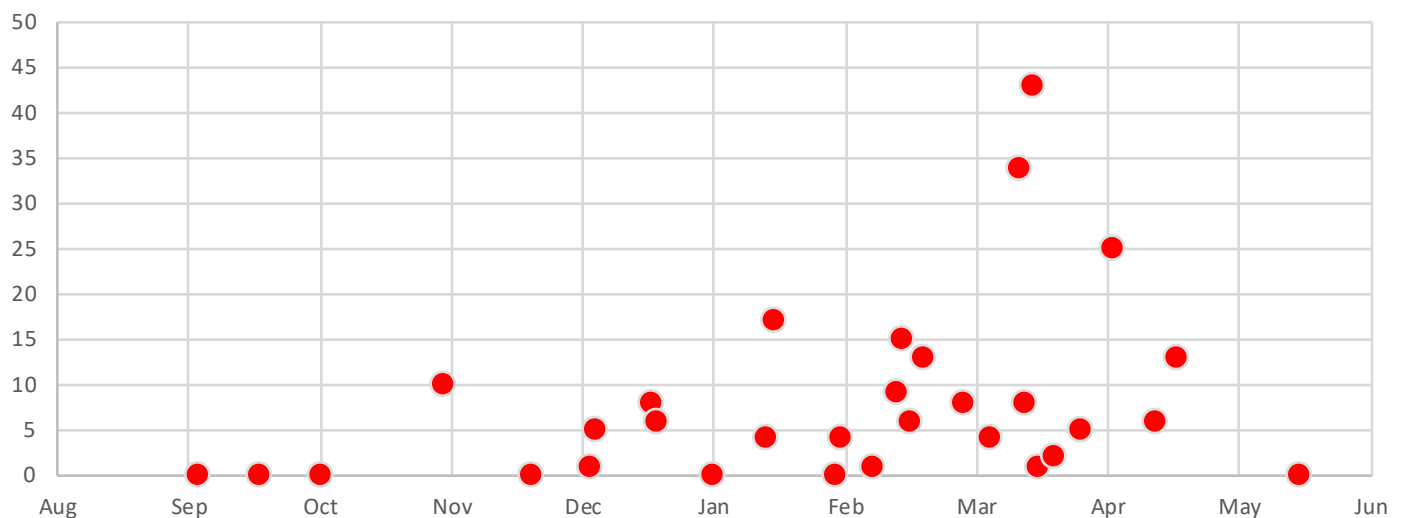
• Number of Seals Seen



CHURCH COVE, BRISTOL

2018-2019 SEAL OBSERVATIONS

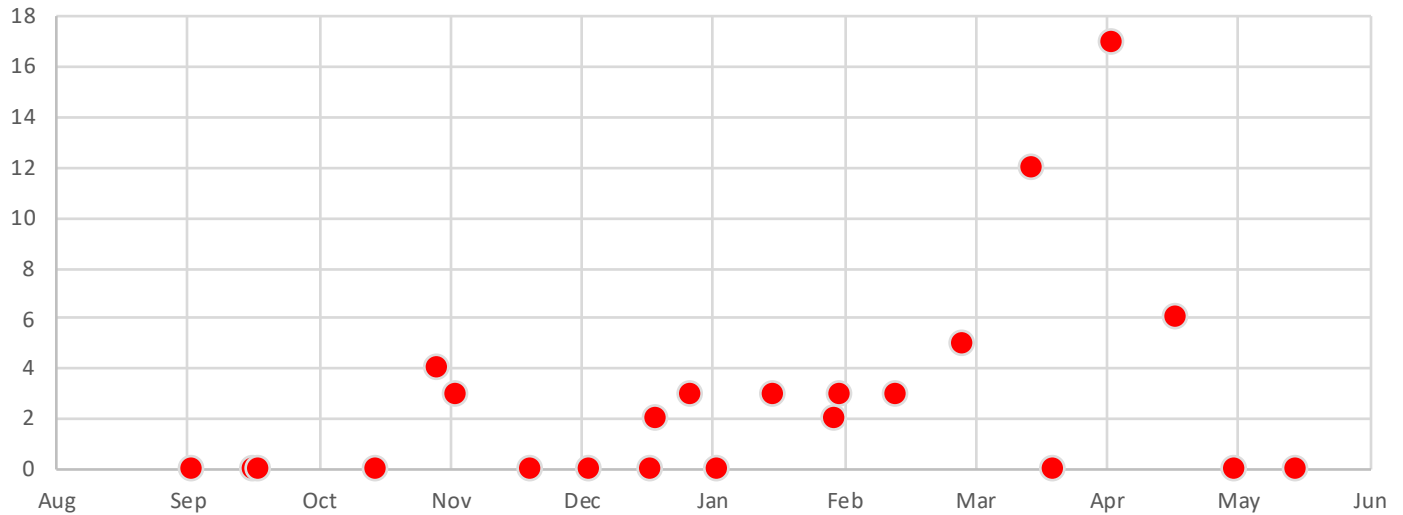
• Number of Seals Seen



*Seasonal Seal Monitoring, continued***ROCKY POINT, WARWICK**

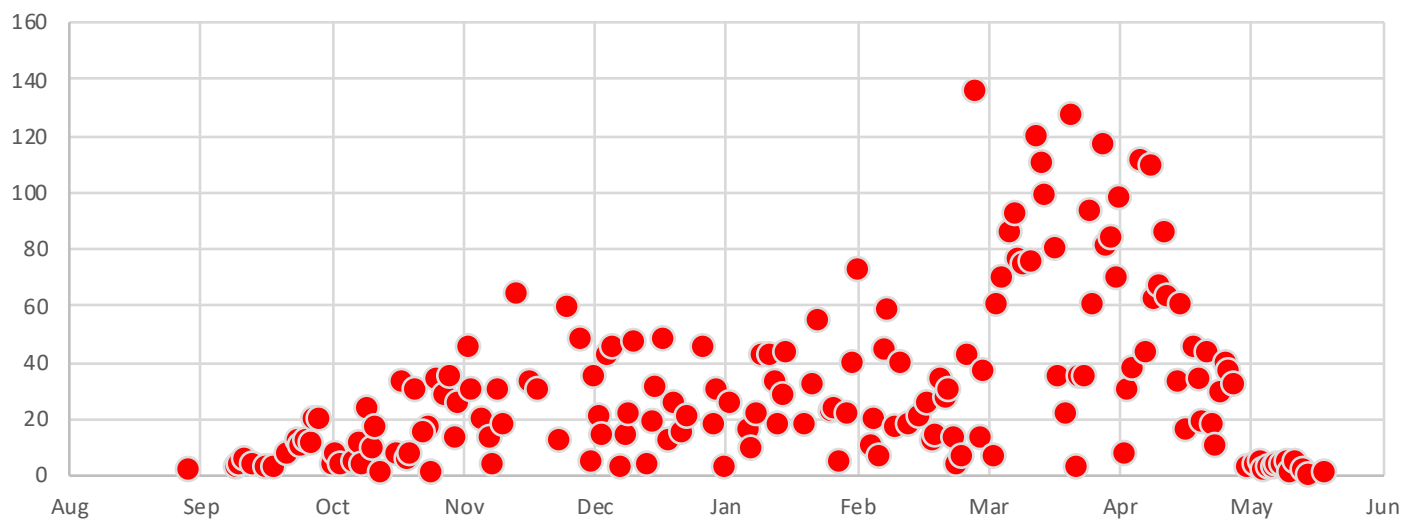
2018-2019 SEAL OBSERVATIONS

• Number of Seals Seen

**ROME POINT, NORTH KINGSTOWN**

2018-2019 SEAL OBSERVATIONS

• Number of Seals Seen



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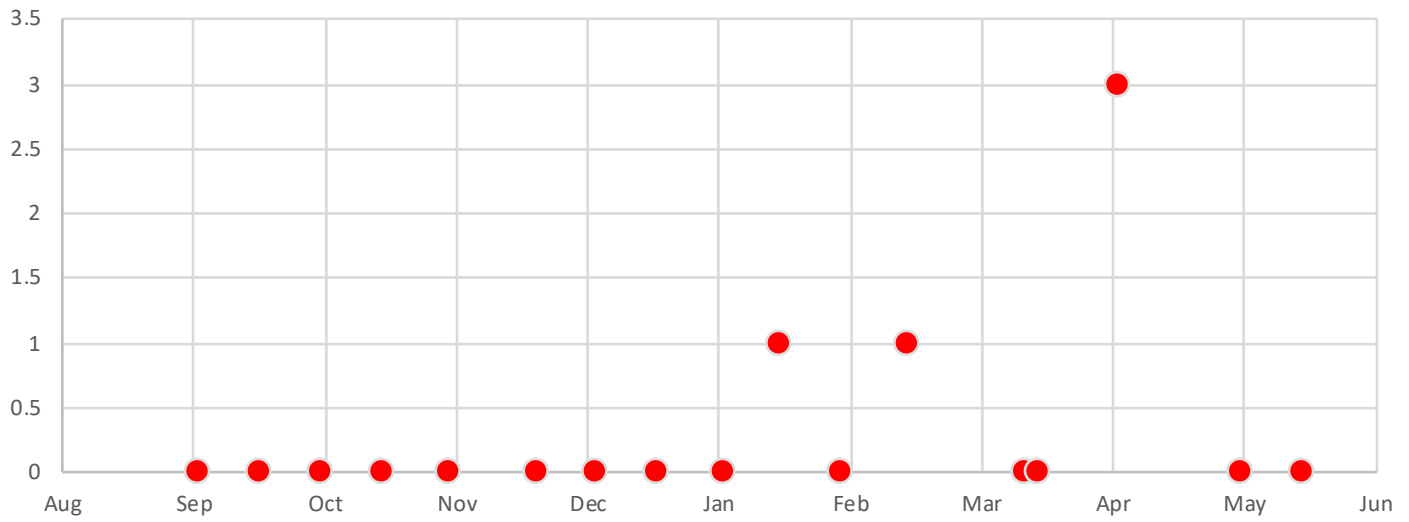
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*Seasonal seal monitoring, continued***RUMSTICK POINT, BARRINGTON**

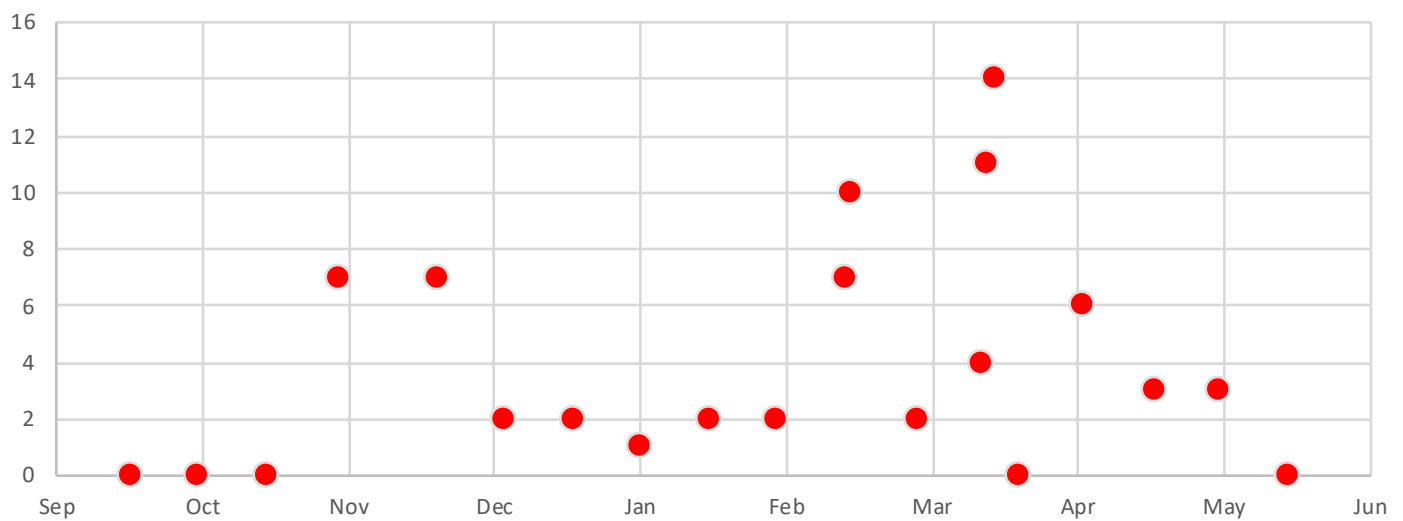
2018-2019 SEAL OBSERVATIONS

• Number of Seals Seen

**USHER COVE, BRISTOL**

2018-2019 SEAL OBSERVATIONS

• Number of Seals Seen



HISTORICAL SEAL MONITORING DATA BY LOCATION

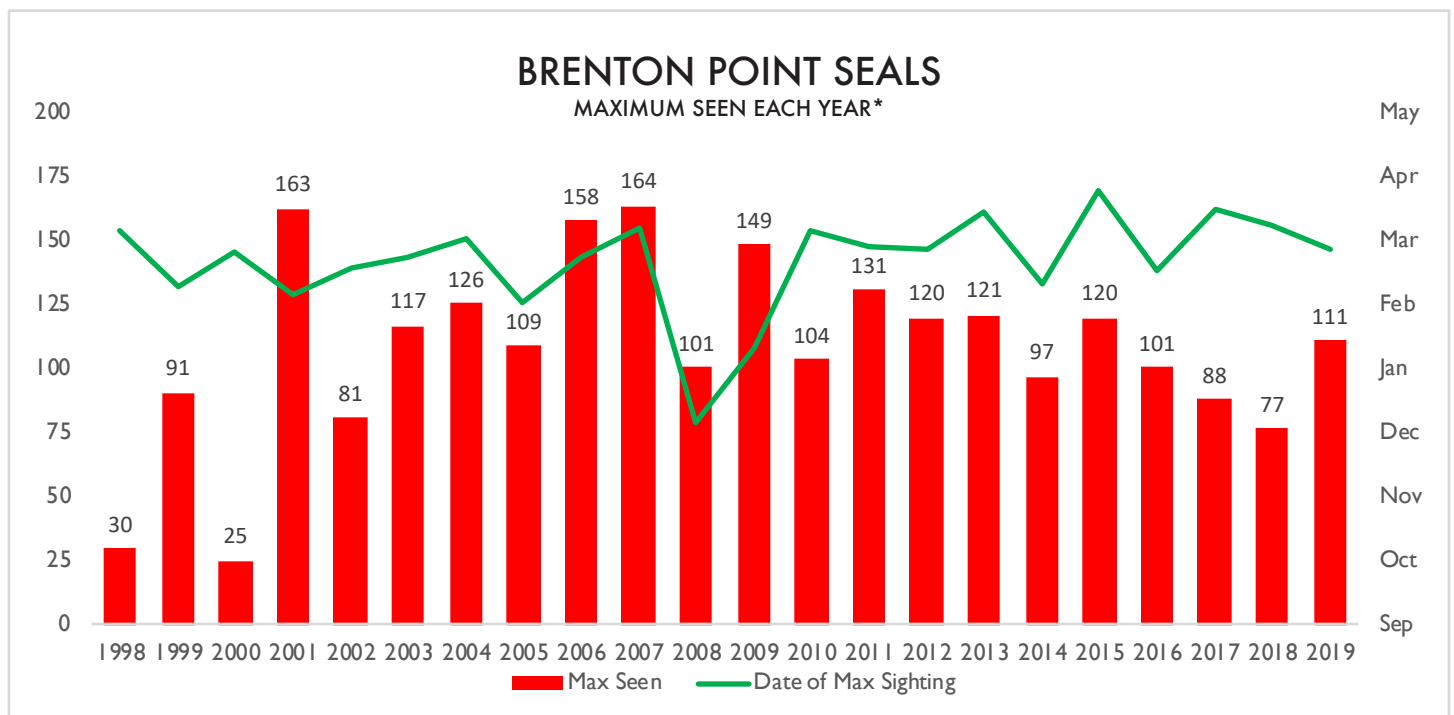
The following haul-out sites have had detailed, consistent monitoring for many years. In the following graphs, the red bars indicate the highest number of seals seen at each haul-out site for each year. In addition, the month and day that the maximum number was sighted is indicated by the green line.

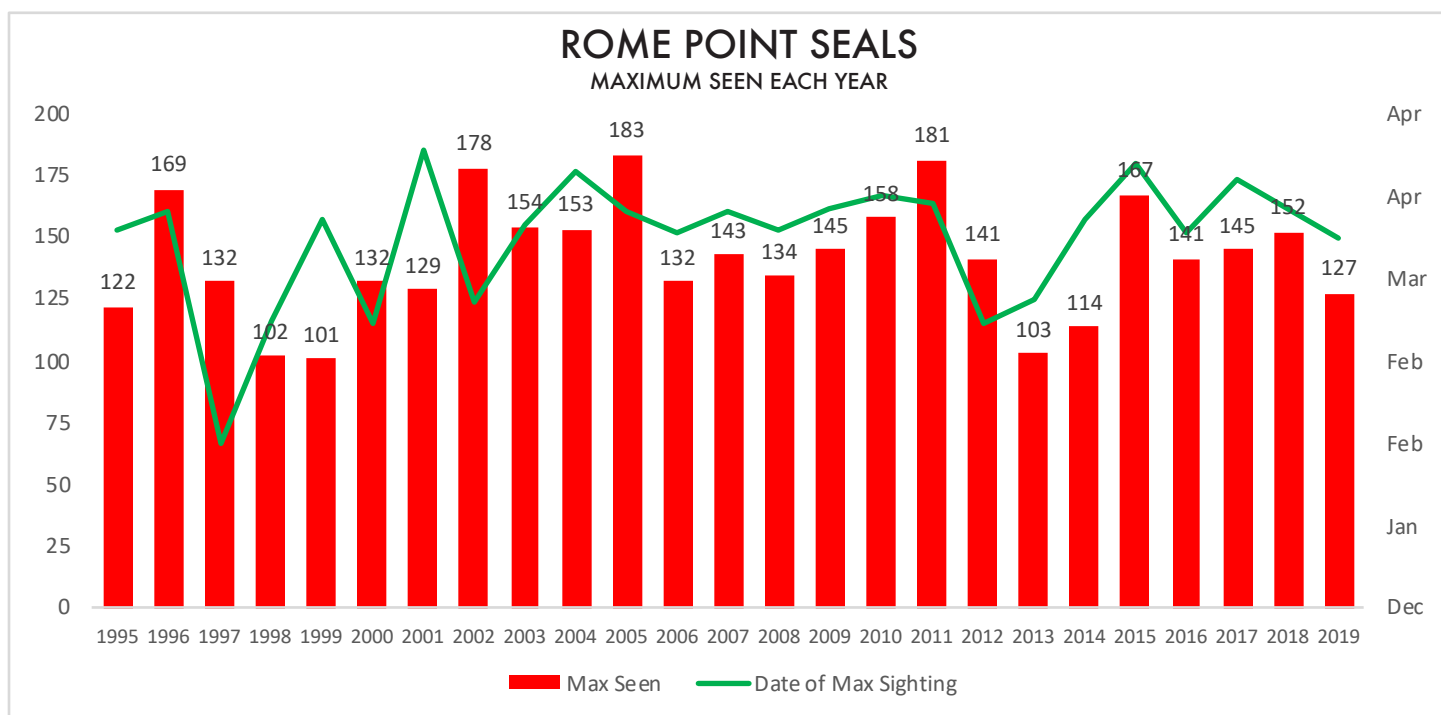
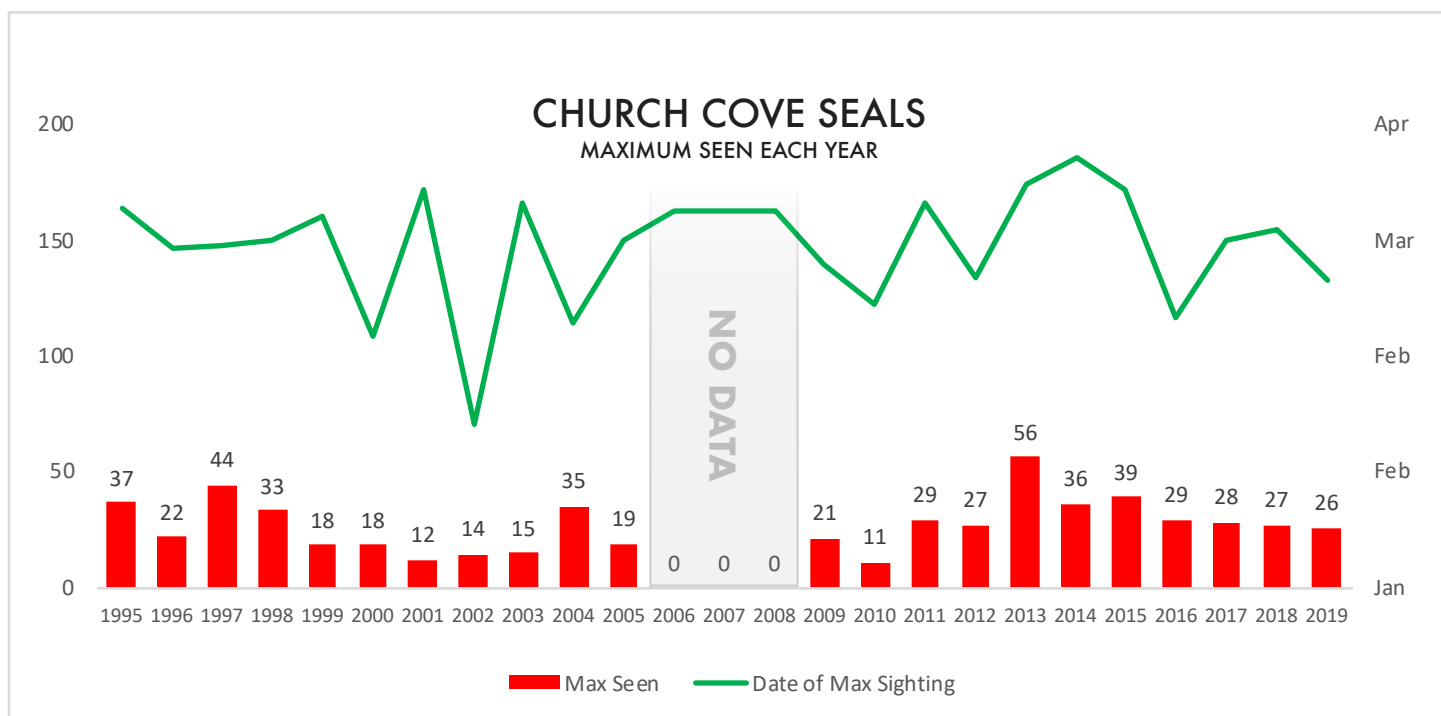
Since each seal season straddles two years (September-May) seal seasons are represented on the X-axis by the year in which they end. Therefore, 2018 refers to the 2017-2018 season. Note that the secondary Y-axis



displays the months of the seal season: September through May. Dips in the green line represent an early maximum, and peaks represent a late maximum.

Looking at long term trends may help us be alert to changes such as impacts from nearby development at a particular site, or the effects of climate change on seal migration.



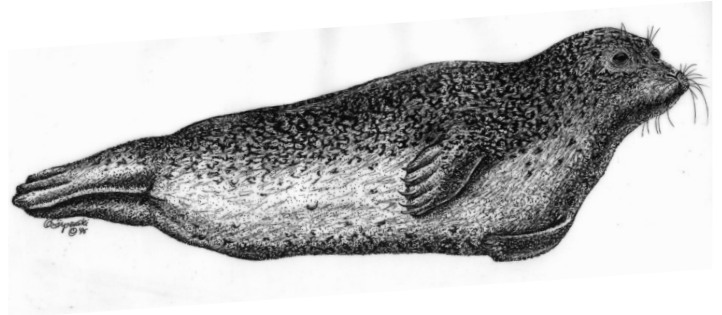
Historical Seal Monitoring by Location, continued

THE SEALS OF NARRAGANSETT BAY

HARBOR SEAL

Size: Males: 5-6 feet, 250 lbs. Females: 4.5-5.5 feet, 175 lbs.

Description: Tan to dark gray with fine dark spotting on the back. As seals dry, their coat changes color. Harbor seals have small heads and large eyes. From a profile view they have a short muzzle and a concave forehead, much like a dog's head. They are the most common marine mammal in New England.



GRAY SEAL

Size: Males up to 8 feet and 800 lbs; females up to 7 feet and 400 lbs.

Description: Very large seal; long and broad snout resembles a horse head. Juveniles can be confused with harbor seals. Their coat is brown, gray or black with spots and blotches on the neck and sides. Males are darker than females. They live in colonies on sandy island beaches, and are occasionally seen on Rhode Island's south shore.



HARP SEAL

Size: At weaning, 65 to 80 lbs. Adults 5-6 feet, 250-400 lbs.

Description: White pups born on pack ice in the Canadian sub-Arctic. Juveniles are gray to dark tan with dark spots. In older harp seals the black spots converge on the back into a harp-shaped design. Some harp seals retain their spotted pelage ("spotted harps"). Of the seals that retain their spots, some have dark gray streaks, creating a completely gray pelage ("sooty harps"). Some adults and juveniles may wander south of their range into New England during winter.



HOODED SEAL

Size: At weaning, 110 lbs. Adult males up to 9 feet and 900 lbs; females smaller.

Description: Juveniles are called "blue-backs" due to the steel-blue color of the top half of their back; no spots. Adult seals have blue-gray pelage with black spots over the body. The front of the face is black. Their limbs are rather small in proportion to their body. Hooded seals get their name from the inflatable "hood" on the top of the heads of adult males. When the hood is deflated, it hangs down over the upper lip. Males inflate this red, balloon-like nasal septum until it protrudes out of one nostril. Juveniles may wander south of their range into New England after weaning.





SEAL WATCHING TIPS

Many people enjoy watching seals at their haul-out sites. However, sometimes observers can put stress on the seals and frighten them off their resting spots, causing them to lose precious energy. What might seem like a minor disturbance may be one of many they experience throughout the day and is, in fact, a violation of the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Follow these tips to get the most out of your seal-watching experience and keep seals safe.

When to Watch

Best times are February-early April, at low tide, on a calm day.

How to Watch

- From at least 50 yards away with binoculars or a telescope.
- Leash or control your dog.
- **From a Boat:** Maintain a parallel course at least 50 yards away, which is less threatening than a direct approach. Avoid sudden changes in course or speed, or circling the animals. Kayaks and canoes, with their low profiles and quiet approach, can actually be more threatening than motorboats.

Be Alert for Signs of Disturbance

Seals stretching their necks, moving toward the water, looking at you or increasing their vocalization indicate that the seals are preparing to flee. Back off immediately.

Do Not Feed the Seals

Feeding encourages seals to approach boats, increasing the likelihood for propeller injuries. Seals also bite, carrying infectious diseases.

Leave Stranded Seals Alone

If you find a seal that is dead, being harassed, or stranded in the same area for more than 24 hours, please contact Mystic Aquarium at 860-572-5955.

The Marine Mammal Protection Act prohibits disturbing, feeding or harassing seals.

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