2020 annual report



Monk Seal Conservation Program at Cabo Blanco

Executed by







Funded by







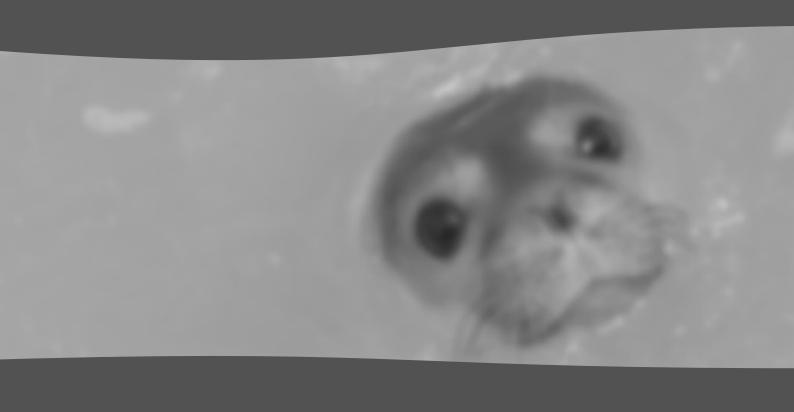








2020 annual report



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Control and surveillance of the marine and terrestrial reserve "Costa de las Focas"

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1. Introduction

The reserve "Costa de las Focas" created in 2001 to protect the last large colony of Mediterranean monk seals, is located at the Cabo Blanco peninsula, on the West African coast.

The Reserve extents 6.2 km along the coast from the parallel 21º00,631′ N to 21º04,00′ N. It protects the largest Mediterranean monk seal colony of the world on one of the most productive fishing grounds of the planet, where international fishing fleets and an important number of local artisanal pirogues operate.

It is important to remember as well that the reserve is just 7 km. from the second largest city of Mauritania, Nouadhibou, in clear expansion. Although, the local people do not harm the seals directly, their constant presence at the coast and in the caves is an important source of disturbance for breeding or use of determinate open beaches or accessible caves.

The goals of "Costa de las Focas" Reserve are:

- To keep tranquillity to the colony of the Mediterranean monk seal.
- To prevent the setting of fishing gears in the marine protected area.
- To assure the survival of the largest Mediterranean monk seal colony of the world.

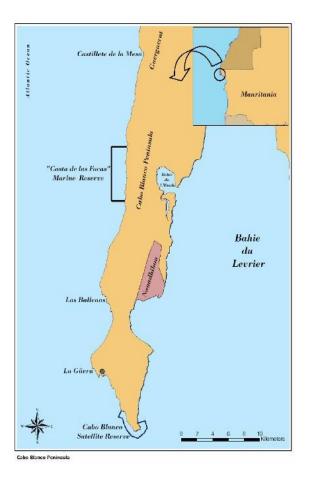
2. Methodology

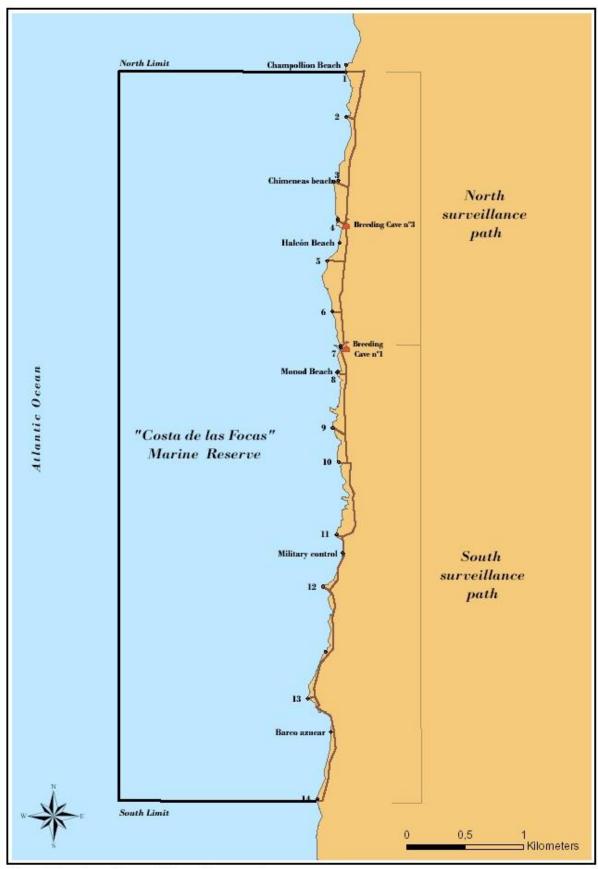
The conservation agents take information of any infraction or disturbance detected at the inside limits of the reserve. Those infractions could be at land or sea, by day or night. That it is why there are three types of surveillance:

- Daily surveillance: Twice a day, the surveillance of the total coastal area of the reserve is performed to make sure there are no infractions at its inside.
- Night surveillance: Where industrial vessels are detected fishing closer than the legal limit of 12 nautical miles offshore.
- Monthly surveillance: to detect any signs or evidences of illegally activities (fishermen fishing from the cliff-tops, goose barnacle collectors, etc.) done at night or in between observatories

The information compiled from this surveillance work is sent to a data base which shows land and marine infractions, as well as any other notable event.

The map on the following page shows the location of the observatories, within the Reserve, from where the conservation agents carry out surveillance during their daily itineraries.





"Costa de las Focas" Terrestrial surveillance paths

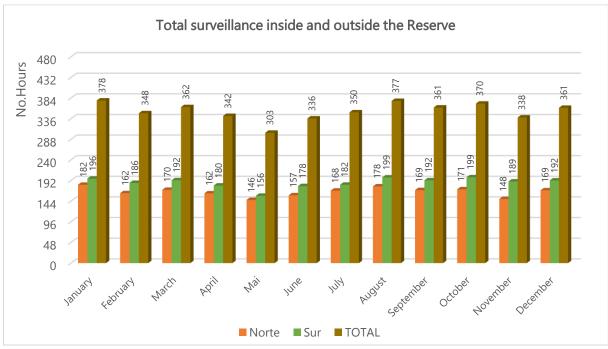
3. Results

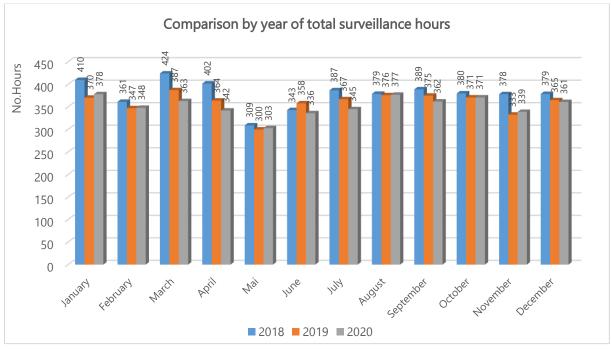
3.1. Daily surveillance

3.1.1. Effort of Surveillance

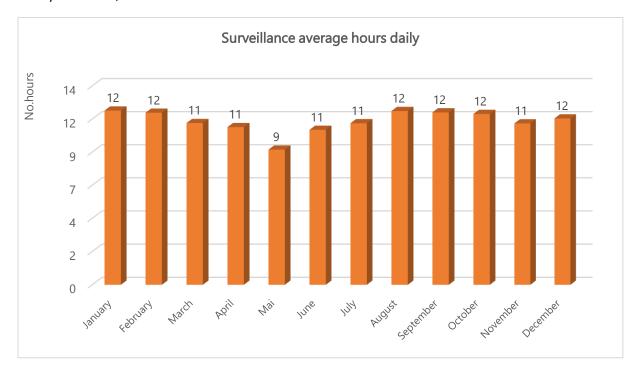
The conservation agents survey the entire coastline of the reserve using the 14 different observatories created for that purpose on top of the cliffs. From those observatories, they take the information of any land or marine infraction they detect. The results showed on this report are from the data registered from January to December 2020.

The total number of hours spent in reserve surveillance was **4232,5**, with a **daily average of 12 hours**, distributed according to the following graphic:

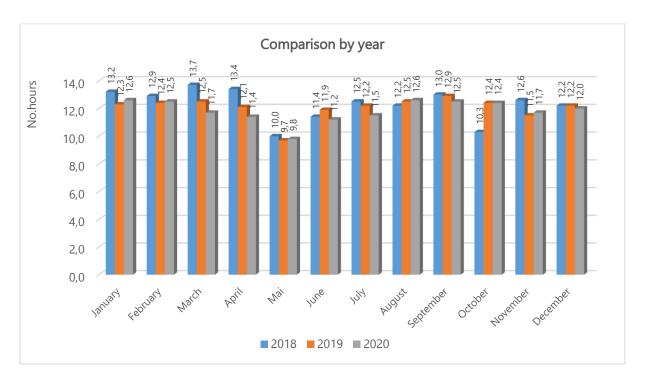




Surveillance average hours daily. Average time per day spent by the conservation agents on the two daily itineraries, both to the north and south of the Reserve.



Comparison by year. The average monthly hours of surveillance carried out during three consecutive years are compared.



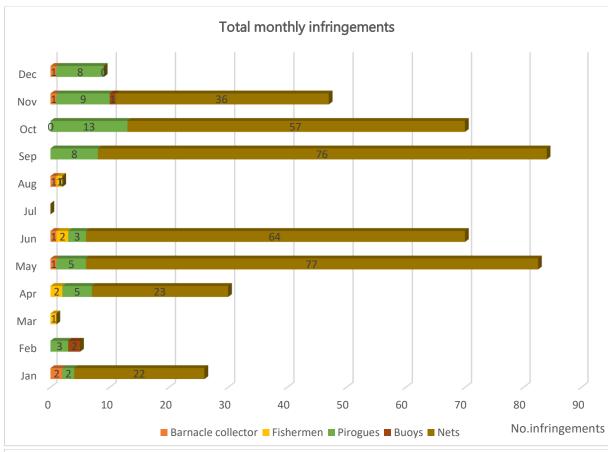
3.1.2. Offences inside the reserve

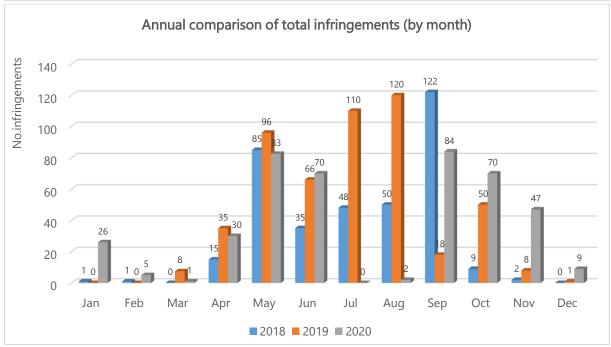
The surveillance of the marine area of the reserve, was daily performed from land. Conservation agents on their daily patrols, or every time they observed from the cliffs an offence within the limits of the

reserve, would inform the local coordinator who would go to the harbor to denounce the situation to local authorities and to make clear that the area is under surveillance.

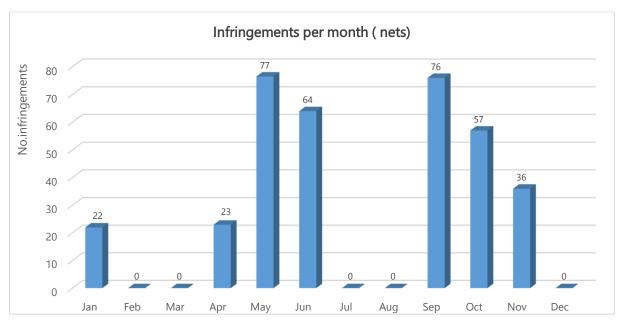
Land surveillance eliminated the negative impact the lack of marine surveillances implied. The work performed by land, was reinforced by taking pictures of the offences detected in the reserve.

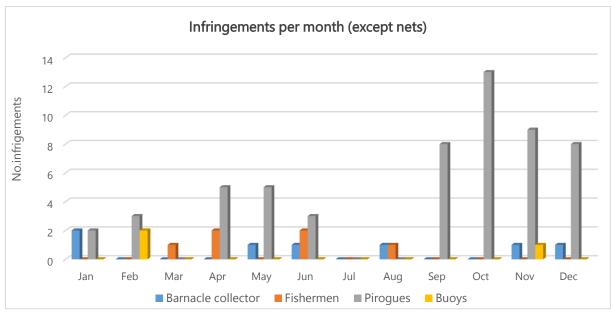
Infractions are distributed according to the following graphic:





Infringements per month, divided into two graphs. The first one looks only at nets, as this is usually the most common infringement. The next graph summarises the other four types:

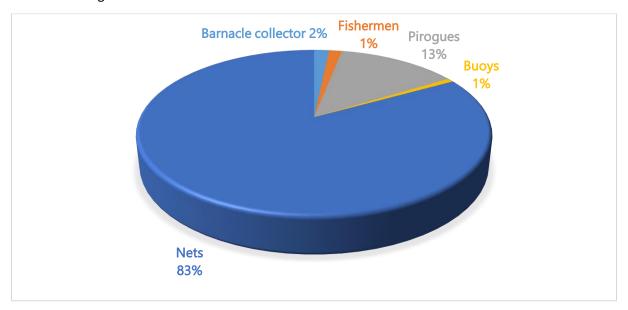




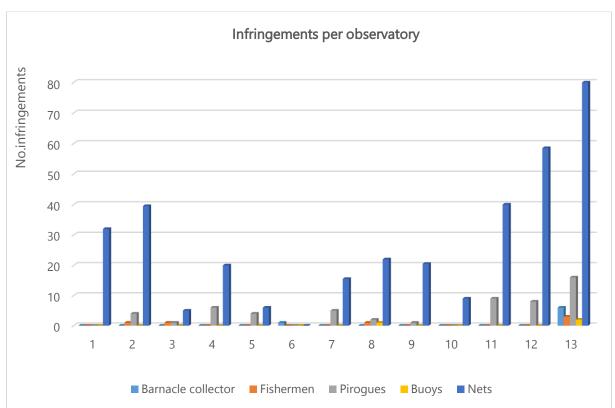
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Barnacle collector	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	1
Fishermen	0	0	1	2	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0
Pirogues	2	3	0	5	5	3	0	0	8	13	9	8
Buoys	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Nets	22	0	0	23	77	64	0	0	76	57	36	0

A slight decrease in the number of offences detected this year in the reserve compared to the previous year (427 compared to 512 detected in 2019), indicates that the effectiveness of constant vigilance is high.

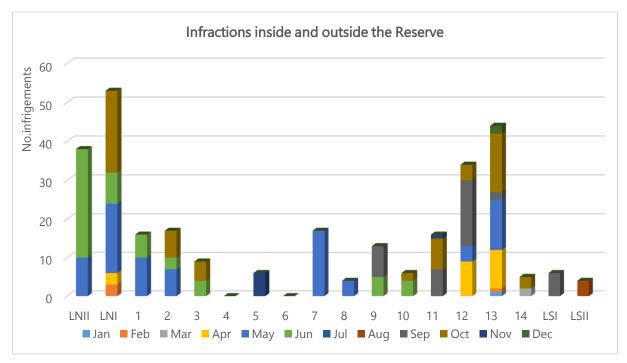
Infringements by typology. Gives an idea of the number (expressed as a percentage of the total) of each of the five categories of offences.



Infringements per observatory. Sum of the number of infringements recorded in each observatory.

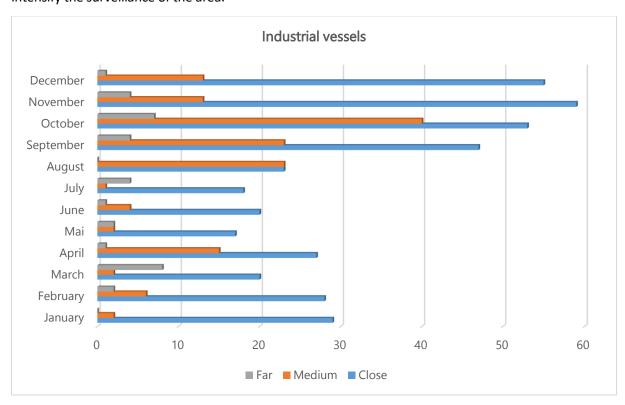


Infractions inside and outside the Reserve. This graph only compares infractions data collected in the Reserve on days when runs are made to the northern and southern boundaries, to equalise the effort.



3.2. Night surveillance

Industrial fishing is still a very serious threat to the Cabo Blanco monk seal population due to the high interaction rate that some industrial fishing gears may have (for example, pelagic trawling). Many ships have been sighted fishing at a much closer distance than the 12 miles legally allowed. Every time this type of infraction is detected, the Moroccan fishing authorities are warned of the fact and asked to intensify the surveillance of the area.



Monitoring monk seal Cabo Blanco colony

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1. Introduction

The aim of this initiative is to maintain a non-invasive monitoring system that does not cause disturbances on the seals' breeding and resting areas, while permitting:

- Seal counts inside the caves to define their habitat use and their population numbers.
- Define the number of pups born every year as well as the rates and causes of their mortality.
- Monitoring adult females and the definition of the population's breeding cycle.
- Individual identification of the members of the colony.
- Detection of any threat or catastrophe that could affect the breeding colony.
- Detection of dead, sick or injured seals.

2. Methodology

The inside of the breeding caves, were monitored from January to December 2018 using the following methods:

2.1. Direct observation using closed-circuit cameras installed in the two main breeding caves (Monitor)

The use of TV cameras is a highly efficient monitoring method which minimizes any potential disturbance caused by the physical presence of a person. This method facilitates the detection of births, monitoring of mother-pup couples, breeding behavior and the identification of individuals of each category, particularly adult males.

Pups are monitored individually without having to tag the individuals thanks to the exclusive unique design of the ventral patch of each pup until its first molt, at around 2 months of age. This ventral patch design enables us to individually identify them and also to sex them. A file is opened for each pup to record details about its growth patterns.

Monitoring of the breeding caves is performed on a daily basis, allowing an assessment of the colony's productivity as well as the neonatal mortality. It also permits the detection of pre-birth behavior, female gestation, adoption phenomenon and stealing of pups between different reproductive females, all of which is of great help to estimate the undetected productivity of the females who may have lost their pups.

2.2. Direct observation by researchers who are suspended at the cave entrances using climbing techniques ("Guíndola" or suspended chair)

This monitoring method is used as little as possible as in some cases it may be somewhat disturbing for the seals. It is therefore only used when the TV cameras cannot be used for monitoring due to rough sea conditions, and in cave 7 when its camera is not working (the camera of this cave is only used at the main breeding season months because the entrance of the cave is very low and waves could destroy the camera in fall and winter.

2.3. Observation from the cliff

The cliff offers the possibility of making controls and counts of the population. This is the third method used.

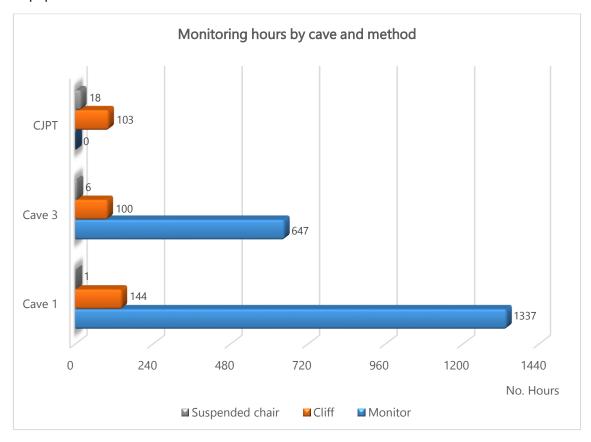
3. Results

3.1. Effort monitoring

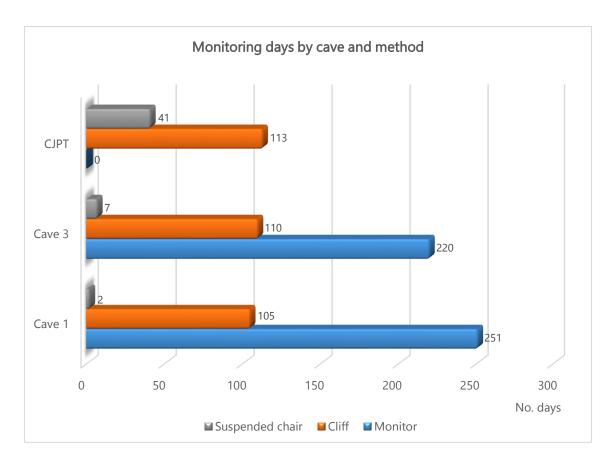
Between January and December 2020, **2356 observation hours** were spent at the breeding caves.

The total number of monitoring hours per cave is higher in cave 1 than in the other two caves, because in these period most pups were born in its inside beach, which increased the surveillance effort in order to maintain a good monitoring of those first-borns.

But if instead of considering the effort by hours we do it by days, we can conclude that all areas were well monitored, but less hours of effort were required in cave 3 due to the reduce number of pups born there.

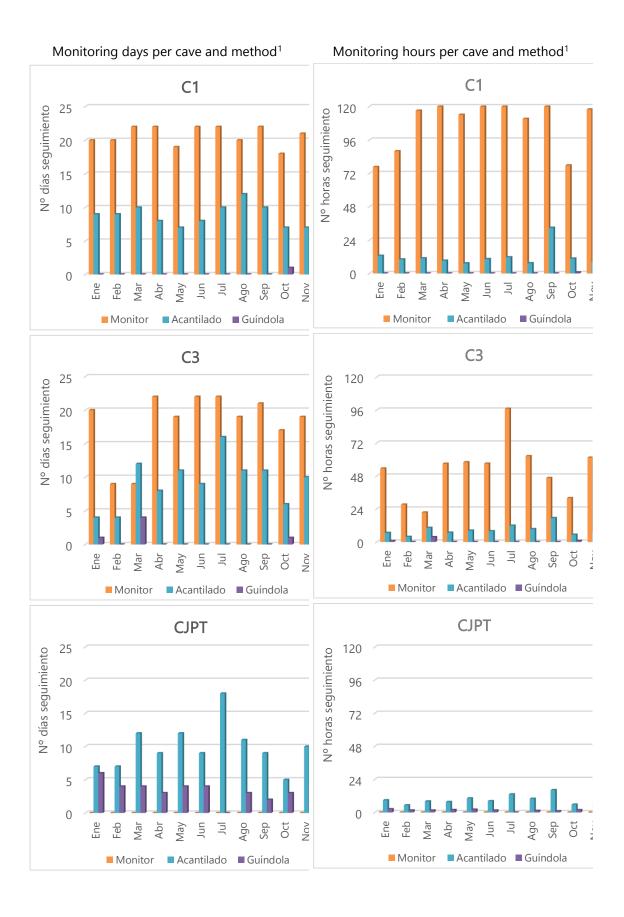


HOURS	Cave 1	Cave 3	Cave 7
Monitor	1.337	647	0
Cliff	144	100	103
Susp.Chair	1	6	18
Total	1.482	753	121



DAYS	Cave 1	Cave3	Cave 7
Monitor	251	220	0
Cliff	105	110	113
Susp. Chair	2	7	41
Total	358	337	154

The surveillance monthly distribution shows a variable pattern throughout the year. This variation is in function of the occupancy of the places by the seals, of the development of other activities not related to direct observation, and of the sea conditions, especially in CJPT, where difficulty increases by the end of the year (due to the bad sea conditions). In the period from September to November, the monitoring effort decreased, due to the preparation and development of the capture and release operation. Also in December, the field team was in Madrid reviewing all the field protocols.



¹ The abscissae have the same value in order to be able to compare efforts.

3.2. Photo-identification effort

Four times a month, on average, identification sessions are carried out from the cliffs, taking as many photographs as necessary of each animal during one hour, which are then analyzed and identified.

During the months of September and October, intensive photo-identification sessions were carried out, involving 4 hours of photo-identification for 4 consecutive days of effort.

Summary of effort						
Total hours	103:35					
Total photos	13.677					
Number of sessions carried out	74					
No. of sessions expected	48					
Execution rate	154%					

	No.sessions
January	4
February	4
March	7
April	4
Мау	10
June	10
July	0
August	9
September	10
October	4
November	8
December	4

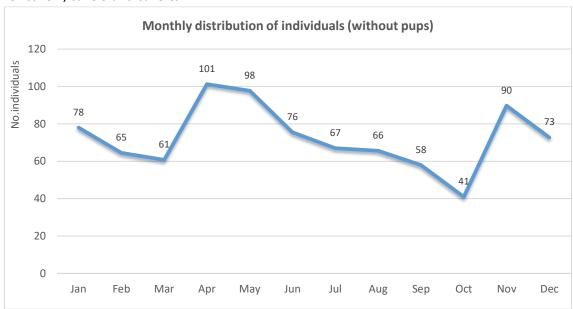
3.3. Seal counts in breeding caves at low tide

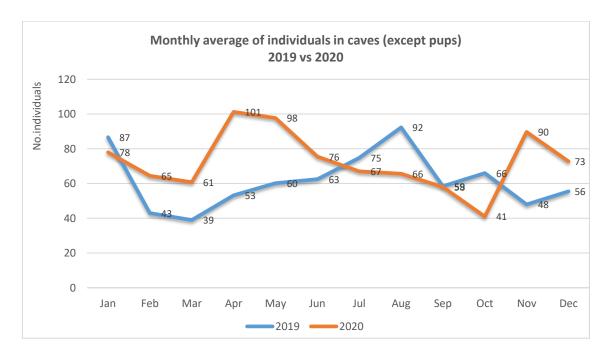
During 2020, a total of **46** counts at low tide were conducted in each breeding cave, resulting in an average of **3,8** counts per month. Beaches close to the breeding caves are added to the counts at low tide. At the counts, pups and youngsters are not taken into account.

January	4
February	4
March	4
April	4
May	4
June	4
July	4
August	3
September	4
October	3
November	4
December	4

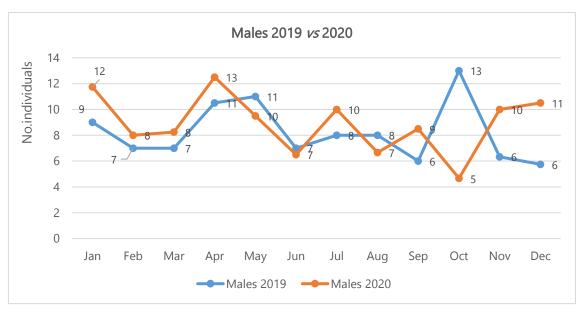
Expected counts	48
Counts carried out	46
Percentage of implementation	96%

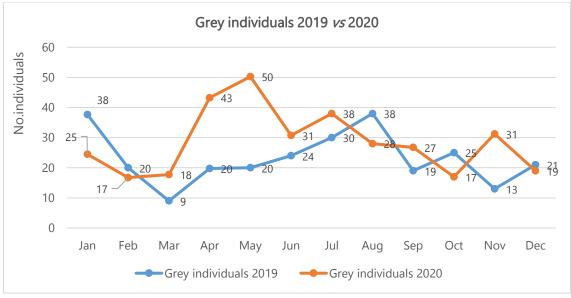
Counts at low tide (without pups and youngsters) results show a very variable use of the caves. The maximum number of seals counted in each cave for this period of time was **40**, **102**, **and 38** for cave **1**, cave **3** and cave CJPT.

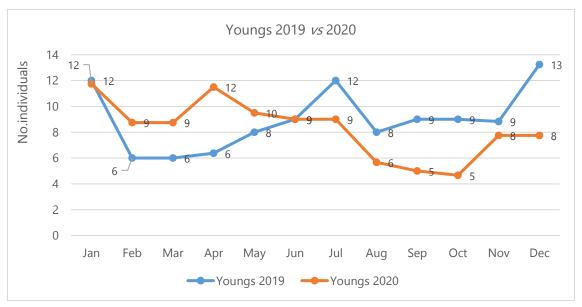




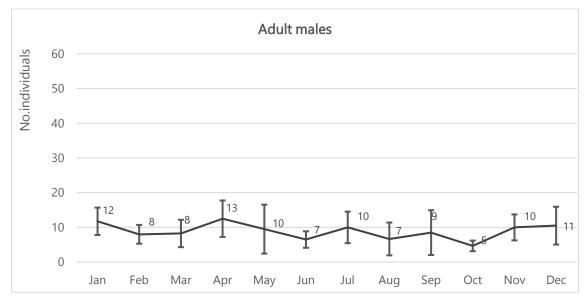
The monthly average distribution of the results obtained from the counts at the three caves and the beaches of their surroundings at low tide indicates, in average, a regular use of them all year around. Nevertheless, we have to take into account that the visibility of the inner beach of Jean Paul Taris cave is very partial, so when the animals are occupying this cave, most of them are not visible, which affects the results of the counts.

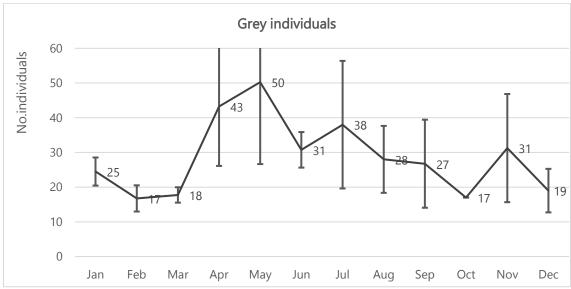


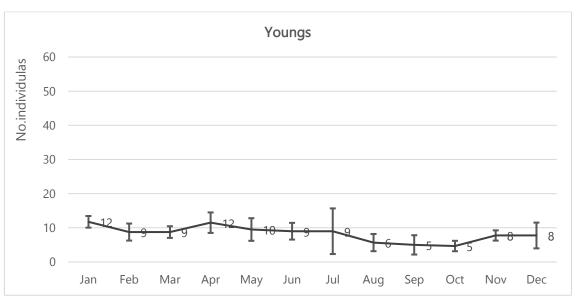




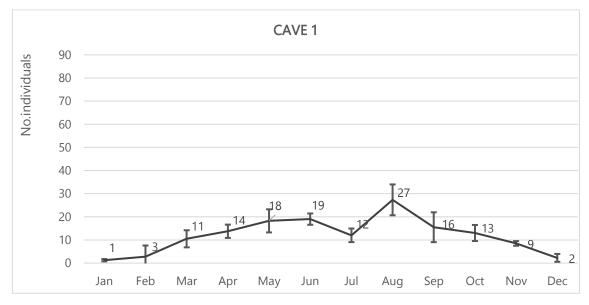
Monthly evolution of individuals inside caves by category (μ and σ)

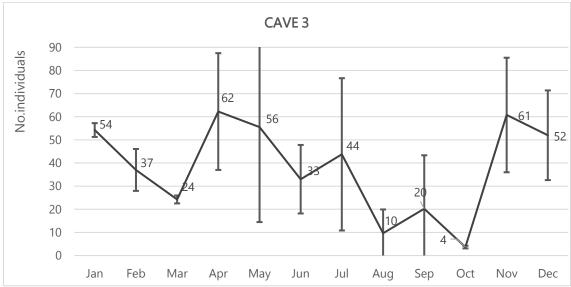


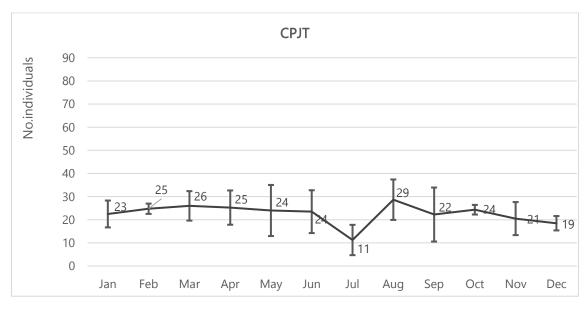


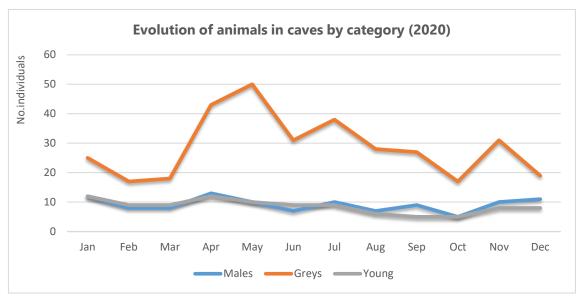


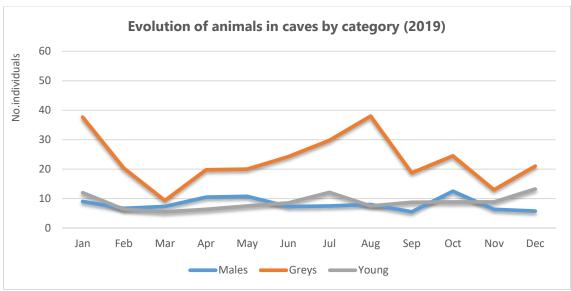
Monthly evolution of individuals inside caves by cave (μ and σ)







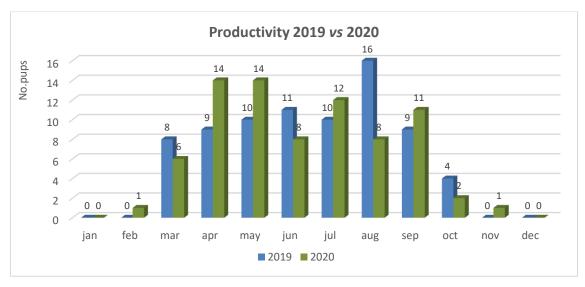




2020	Adult males	Grey individuals	Juveniles
January	12	25	12
February	8	17	9
March	8	18	9
April	13	43	12
May	10	50	10
June	7	31	9
July	10	38	9
August	7	28	6
September	9	27	5
October	5	17	5
November	10	31	8
December	11	19	8

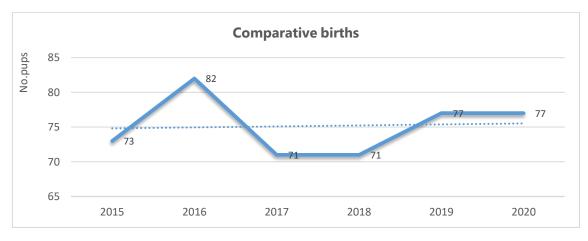
3.4. Productivity

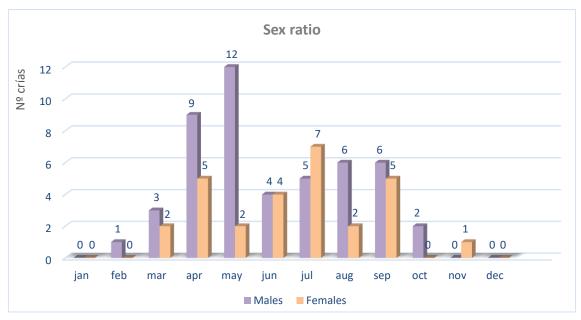
In total 77 pups were born between February and November. Of those pups, 48 were males and 28 were females, the rest (1) were of unknown sex (meaning that we detected their birth but we were not able to determine their gender before disappearing).

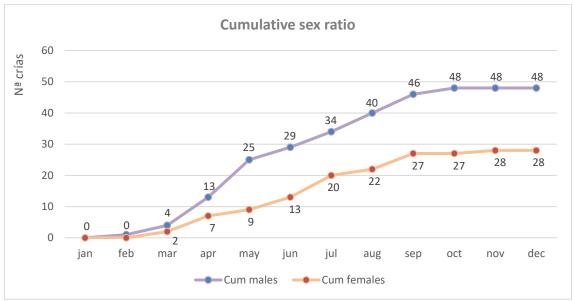


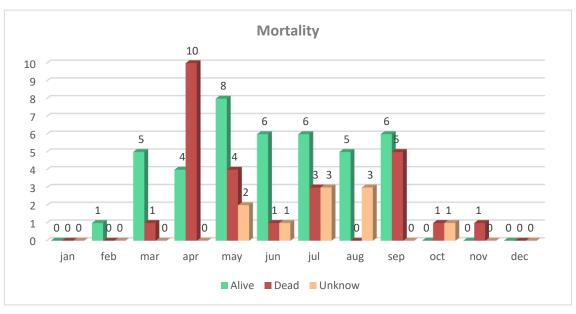


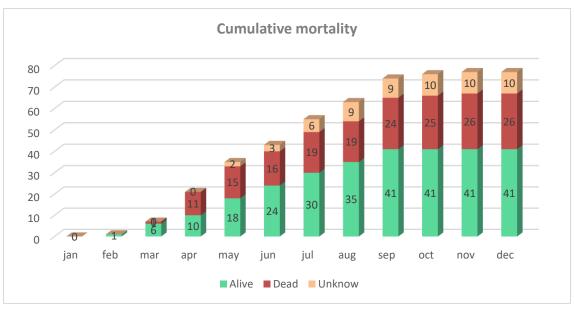
If compare the number of births in the last five years, the trend is stable and no appreciable deviations are observed:

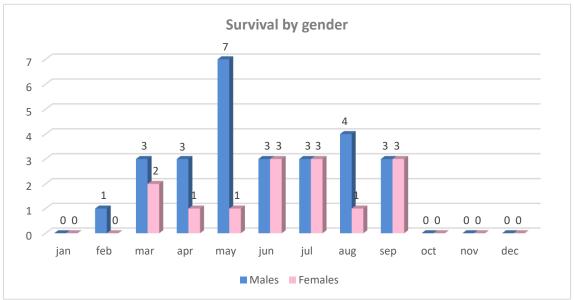


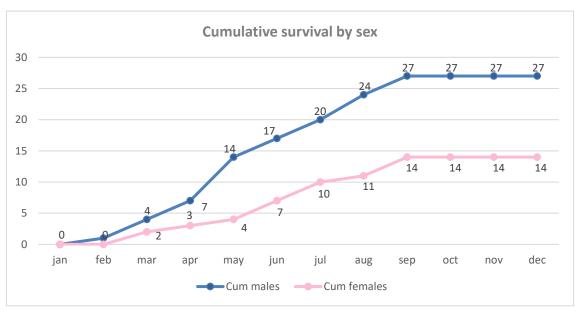


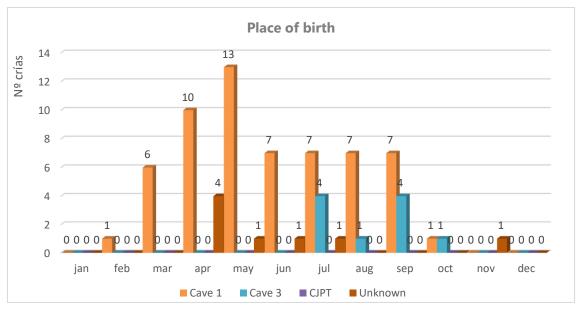


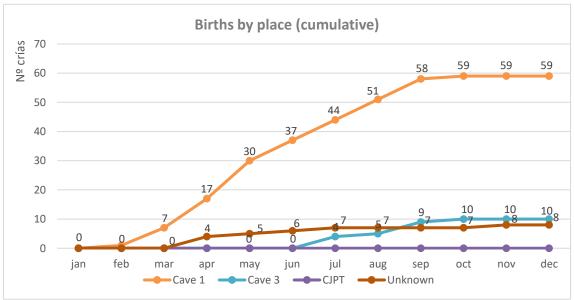








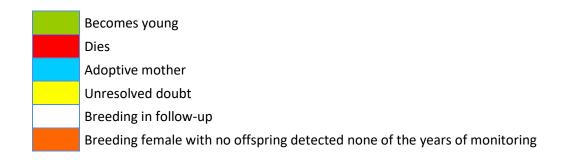




EXPECTED LABOUR OF BREEDING FEMALES								
Nº		Female	2018	2019	2020			
4	2006							
23	2111	10/07/2017			06/07/2020			
32	2125	29/08/2017		03/08/2019	10/08/2020			
34	2130	04/09/2017		16/09/2019	23/09/2020			
37	2135	03/07/2017	16/07/2018					
39	2137	24/07/2017	30/07/2018					
43	2141							
45	2145	06/09/2017						
47	2154		19/05/2018					
48	2156	15/05/2017						
49	2158							
50	2166	25/09/2017	03/10/2018		14/09/2020			
51	2168				01/09/2020			
52	2177	18/08/2017						
53	2183		02/05/2018		08/04/2020			
54	2188	17/05/2017	28/05/2018					
55	2189			09/06/2019				
56	2196	07/09/2017		20/09/2019	14/09/2020			
57	2198							
58	2199	17/05/2017						
59	2290		30/04/2018					
60	2291	15/05/2017	07/05/2018	04/05/2019	05/05/2020			
61	2294	27/06/2017						
62	2313	22/08/2017		30/08/2019	02/09/2020			
63	2318		07/05/2018		18/05/2020			
64	2320				14/08/2020			
65	2321	17/07/2017	09/07/2018					
66	2323	20/03/2017	26/03/2018	13/03/2019				
67	2324				04/08/2020			
68	2326	15/05/2017			08/04/2020			
69	2329							
70	2332		24/09/2018	20/09/2019				
71	2333	16/05/2017	19/05/2018	07/05/2019	27/04/2020			
72	2334	21/08/2017						
73	2335	12/07/2017						
74	2342							
75	2345	14/06/2017	13/06/2018	03/06/2019	04/06/2020			

Nō		Female	2018	2019	2020		
76	2346	Adoptive mother					
77	2352	Adoptive mother					
78	2353		14/05/2018	01/05/2019			
79	2358	24/07/2017	26/07/2018	27/07/2019	27/07/2020		
80	2361						
81	2363				13/05/2020		
82	2364				28/08/2020		
83	2367	25/08/2017	16/08/2018	18/08/2019	24/08/2020		
84	2369	Adoptive mother	18/06/2018				
85	2373		30/07/2018				
86	2377	16/10/2017	29/10/2018	29/09/2019	13/10/2020		
87	2378		13/07/2018		06/07/2020		
88	2379	27/03/2017	26/03/2018	20/03/2019	30/03/2020		
89	2382			02/07/2019	01/07/2020		
90	2392						
91	2397	7 02/05/2017 02/05/2018 04/05		04/05/2019	/2019		
92	2385	02/05/2017		Adoptive mother	mother		
93	2402		06/08/2018	29/06/2019	06/07/2020		
94	2404	25/09/2017			21/09/2020		
95	2405	11/10/2016	11/10/2016				
96	2410		14/06/2018	15/06/2019			
97	2417		08/10/2018		27/07/2020		
98	2421	04/09/2017					
99	2423	02/05/2017	05/2017				
100	2426			11/07/2019			
101	2427	20/03/2017					
102	2429		04/06/2018				
103	2433	27/03/2017	06/04/2018	04/05/2019	30/03/2020		
104	2437				09/06/2020		
105	2441				13/07/2020		
106	2447	24/03/2017		12/03/2019	09/03/2020		
107	2448	20/09/2017	03/09/2018	30/08/2019			
108	2449	12/09/2017	29/08/2018	23/08/2019	15/07/2020		
108	2450			06/03/2019	10/03/2020		
108	2454				16/07/2020		
108	2457	25/10/2017					
111	2461		10/05/2018	29/04/2019			
112	2462			22/04/2019			

Nō		Female	2018	2019	2020
113	2463	02/06/2017	05/06/2018	10/06/2019	
114	2464		15/08/2018	03/08/2019	29/06/2020
115	2465				25/08/2020
116	2466		26/07/2018		
117	2471		02/07/2018	12/06/2019	09/06/2020
118	2474	Adoptive mother			
119	2477				Adoptive mother
120	2479		17/07/2018		
121	2482				Adoptive mother
122	2486		03/04/2018	09/04/2019	
123	2489	14/04/2017	03/04/2018		06/04/2020
124	2491				14/05/2020
125	2505				03/06/2020
126	2517				18/05/2020



Coastline Inspections

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	Results	2

1. Introduction

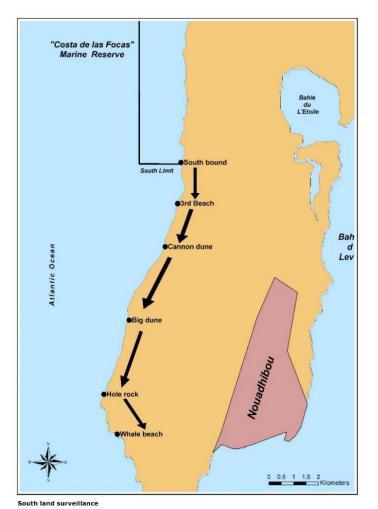
Coastline inspections permit the assessment of mortality associated with the colony using counts of corpses stranded on the beaches south of the breeding caves.

The Cabo Blanco Peninsula beaches south of the reserve are frequently surveyed to detect new carcasses. Sometimes, pups that are still alive are also found, these animals are rescued, rehabilitated and returned to their habitat. During the period the project lasted, no pups alive were found at those coast inspections.

The coastline south of the colony has been divided into sections between identifiable points on the shore. Therefore, a total of 13 km of the coast were fragmented into five sections that are inspected by a quad on an average of 1 per week.

2. Itinerary during inspections

The sections are classified as follows (abbreviation in Spanish):



L.S - 3ªPI:

from the Southern Boundary to the Third Beach.

3ªPI - D.C:

from the Third Beach to the Cannon Dune.

D.C - D.B:

from the Cannon Dune to the Big Dune.

D.B - R.A:

from the Big Dune to Hole Rock.

R.A - L.B:

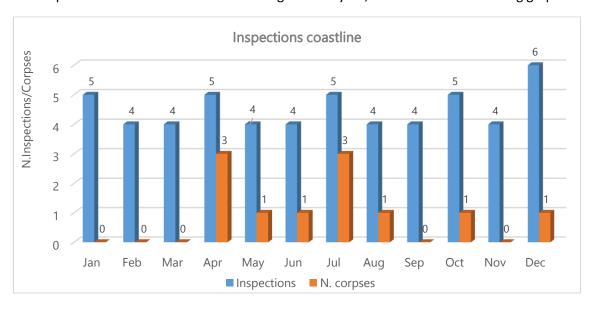
from Hole Rock to Whale Beach.

3. Results

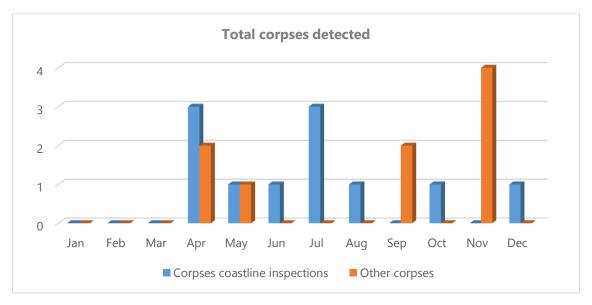
In the period of the report (between 1th January to 31th December 2020), a total of **54** coastline inspections were conducted at the "Costa de las Focas" Reserve.

Coastline inspections	2020
Total number of journeys	54
Monthly average number of journeys	4,5
Seal necropsies	11
Cetacean necropsies	0
Turtle necropsies	0

The inspections have been carried out throughout the year, as shown in the following graph:



During those inspections, 11 carcasses were discovered, 1 of them were adult, 2 youngs, and 8 were pups (less than 2 months old). In addition, 9 other carcasses were detected, mainly in the breeding caves.



	MN	GG	MG-GG	MG	J-MG	J	JC	PUP	TOTAL
January									0
February									0
March									0
April								5	5
May								2	2
June								1	1
July								3	3
August					1				1
September	1							1	2
October			1						1
November								4	4
December								1	1
Total NECROPSIES	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	17	20

		Place (GPS)				_		
No.	Date	Carcasse		То	mb	Age	Gender	Identity
Necropsy		N	W	N	W	category		
01/20	06/04/2020	21.01228º	17.06387º	21.01223º	17.06391º	CNP-CN	Н	P 1187
02/20	10/04/2020	21.02025º	17.06459º	21.02015º	17.06446º	Са сс	М	P 1192
03/20	24/04/2020	20.99278º	17.06648º	20.99278º	17.06637º	CN	М	P 1194
04/20	27/04/2020	Detected	inside C1	corpse	not located	Са	Н	P 1196
05/20	30/04/2020	21.01431º	17.06352º	21.01490º	17.06344º	Са сс	М	P 1199
06/20	12/05/2020	21.01001º	17.06458º	21.009999	17.06450º	Са сс	М	P 1202
07/20	15/05/2020	20.98580º	17.06900º	20.98563º	17.06886º	CNP	М	P 1206
08/20	12/06/2020	21.01760º	17.06477º	21.01752º	17.06414º	CNP	М	P 1219
09/20	14/07/2020	20.97046º	017.07735º	20.97037º	017.07726º	CNP	Н	P 1225
10/20	22/07/2020	21.01765º	017.06480º	21.01777º	017.06451º	CNP	Н	P 1227
11/20	24/07/2020	21.02139º	017.06441º	21.02116º	017.06422º	Ca	М	P 1230
12/20	07/08/2020	20.98590º	17.06907º	20.98580º	17.06881º	J/MG	М	P 1049
13/20	01/09/2020	Detected	inside C3			MN	М	?
14/20	22/09/2020	20.99773º	17.06461º	20.99770º	17.06459º	CNP	М	P 1245
15/20	30/10/2020	20.96200º	17.08256º	20.96224º	17.08209º	MG-GG	Н	
16/20	02/11/2020	21.05820º	17.06384º	21.05805º	17.06391º	CN	М	P 1253
17/20	04/11/2020	21.01743º	17.06420º	21.01749º	17.06415º	CNG	Н	P 1252
18/20	10/11/2020	21.05836º	17.06372º	21.05839º	17.06367º	JC/J	М	?
19/20	16/11/2020	21.01630º	17.06345º	21.01630º	17.06328º	Са сс	Н	P 1255
20/20	17/12/2020	20.97626º	17.07285º	20.97614º	17.07260º	JC	Н	P 1217

Photographic annex



ANNEXE PHOTOGRAPHIQUE SURVEILLANCE 2020 CÔTE DES PHOQUES

BATEAUX DE PÊCHE INDUSTRIELLE À L'INTÉRIEUR DE LA RÉSERVE





5 janvier

13 février





2 juin

5 juin





9 juin

9 juin





2







9 septembre

9 septembre





9 septembre

10 septembre





9 octobre 19 octobre







19 octobre 15 novembre



15 novembre

PIROGUES À L'INTÉRIEUR DE LA RÉSERVE





13 janvier 29 janvier







6 mai





13 mai 16 mai





16 mai 17 mai





Pirogue à senne coulissante devant la grotte 3, le 2 juin. On peut voir un phoque près des filets







2 juin 2 juin





2 juin 3 juin





3 juin 3 juin















25 août 1 septembre







2 septembre

3 septembre





7 septembre

8 septembre





8 septembre

9 septembre







9 septembre

9 septembre





14 septembre

16 septembre





17 septembre

23 septembre







25 septembre

27 septembre





6 octobre

6 octobre





7 octobre

1 novembre







9 novembre



10 novembre



29 novembre



30 novembre







10 décembre







12 décembre







22 décembre

23 décembre

ACTIVIDAD DENTRO DE LA RESERVA







Pêcheur de pouces-pieds, 9 mars







Pêcheurs à l'intérieur de la réserve 28 mars

11 avril





25 avril

25 avril





29 avril

Pêcheur 6 juin







3 septembre

6 septembre





6 septembre

26 décembre

NETTOYAGE ET MAINTENANCE RÉSERVE





Nettoyage des panneaux. Février







Nettoyage de la signalisation. Février





Nettoyage Réserve. Février





Maintenance des panneaux de signalisation la réserve. Février







Nettoyage Réserve. Mars







Nettoyage des panneaux. Mai

Nettoyage Réserve.Mai





Nettoyage Réserve. Juin

Nettoyage Réserve. Août





Nettoyage Réserve. Septembre



Nettoyage Réserve. Septembre



Nettoyage des panneaux. Septembre



Nettoyage Réserve. Novembre



Nettoyage Réserve. Décembre



TRAVAUX DE MAINTENANCE

Installation de la barrière. Juin















Moulin à vent endommagé par la tempête. Juin





Réparation de l'installation des panneaux solaires endommagés par la tempête. Juin

























Réparation d'auvent endommagé par la tempête. Juin









Travaux de maintenance des installations. Octobre

























Maintenance du matériel d'escalade





Effondrement











PHOTOGRAPHIC ANNEX MONITORING 2020 «COSTA DE LAS FOCAS»

Asuad, a black male, resting on the "Banco de Azúcar" beach.

Sighted several times between January and May















Aymerich, black male resting on Escuelas beach. June





February 17th. Birth of P1179, the first seal of 2020





Unusual ventral pattern in a pup

Possible case of supernumerary breasts. Female called Oca





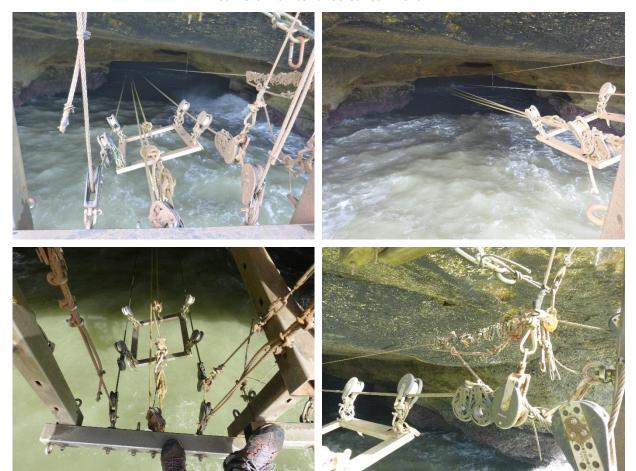


VIDEO SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM MAINTENANCE





Camera maintenance Cave3. March



Cave Jean Paul Taris installation review. August and September









Coastline inspections. Detection of corpses

OTHER ACTIONS





Recording images



VISITS TO THE PROJECT





MAVA Delegation





Spanish Agency for Development Cooperation Delegation





European Union delegation