



A message from Bec and Ross

So here we go, the results of our latest challenge:

“SealSpotter – Back to the Rocks”

What was the event?

- To count as many pups and seals as we could in two weeks 17 - 31 August 2020
- To provide a conservation activity for Citizen Scientists
- Use images from drone surveys to better understand the Australian fur seals at Seal Rocks

This Challenge we counted seals from surveys taken in mid-December to help us predict the time when most of the pups are born. This will allow us to focus our drone surveys at the best time for counting the newborn pups. This challenge was additional to the “2020 Annual SealSpotter Challenge” held in June, and we are excited to inform you that it has been a great success. To all who participated in this second challenge for 2020: thank you so much for your efforts.

Victoria and Melbourne have been experiencing a second round of community restrictions due to COVID-19. While everyone has been at home staying safe, we sincerely hope that this conservation challenge provided you some joy and distraction. One of the fantastic things about drone surveys and internet based counting portals such as SealSpotter is that we can be flexible and provide our collaborators with extra tasks when desirable.

For those keen to keep assist with additional survey counts, we have kept the portal open. Every survey we count adds to our understanding of the health of the colony and the broader ecosystem. Australian fur seals are top predators and the number of pups and other seals reflects the health of the ocean environment. For those who prefer a brief burst of intensity, we look forward to our next collaboration during the “2021 Annual SealSpotter Challenge”.

Summary of participation:

- 184 Citizen Scientists contributed to this event
- Victorian schools used “SealSpotter” to perform research projects at home, including Wonthaggi High School & Nagle College, Bairnsdale.
- For a second time, Shakira counted the most seals
– huge effort, thank you 😊

COLLABORATORS WITH IMAGE COUNTS > 200

Shakira B, 2065
Pirren D, 472
Amy, 226
Oblongo, 211

Summary of results

Thank you to all participants for this second event for Seal Spotter in 2020. It is fantastic to see such a high level of engagement for this novel event and we appreciate your contributions.

Where to next for SealSpotter?

The portal will remain open for our long-term Citizen Scientists to continue counting and for some student programs to perform research projects with their schools and universities. Drone surveys will continue at the onset of the next breeding season at the end of October and we look forward to seeing you all again at the “2021 Annual SealSpotter Challenge”.

What are the Australian fur seals up to now?



Pups are getting bigger and spending a lot of time in the water, getting ready to wean from their mums and become independent. Females are preparing for the next breeding season and growing larger with their pregnancies. The developing pups don't have hair yet, but they are fully formed otherwise. Between now and their birth, they will increase in size to around 6 kg and grow their lanugo coat – a dark soft fur that keeps them warm. Some adult males are practice fighting and trying to impress the females in preparation for the breeding season, but the really large bulls usually don't arrive at Seal Rocks until the start of the breeding season. The bulls fast for several weeks over the breeding season so the experienced ones arrive just in time.

Thank you again for all your hard work. Please stay safe and continue counting if you want to, the portal is open. See you next year for the “Annual SealSpotter Challenge, June 2021.

Bec and Ross ☺, Conservation Department, Phillip Island Nature Parks