

# Man-made snowdrifts in the Saimaa ringed seal conservation

Riikka Alakoski & Miina Auttila  
Metsähallitus Parks & Wildlife Finland

riikka.alakoski@metsa.fi

- Ringed seals depend on ice and snow for breeding
- In mild winters pup mortality of the Saimaa ringed seal (*Pusa hispida saimensis*) is high (~30%)
- Man-made snowdrifts (Fig. 1) have been an established conservation method since 2014
- Piled by around **200 volunteers** annually
- A total of **1500 man-made snowdrifts** in nine years (Fig. 2)
- On average 66% used annually
- Already **300 pups born** in man-made snowdrifts
- Due to the man-made snowdrifts, pre-weaning mortality has remained near the average 14% also in mild winters
- An effective conservation method especially in mild winters without sufficient natural snowdrifts
- Man-made snowdrifts are made annually to secure breeding conditions in the whole breeding area of the seal in Lake Saimaa (Fig. 3)



Photo: Miina Auttila 2023

Fig. 1. A man-made snowdrift piled in an area where almost all snow had melted from the ice during a mild season.

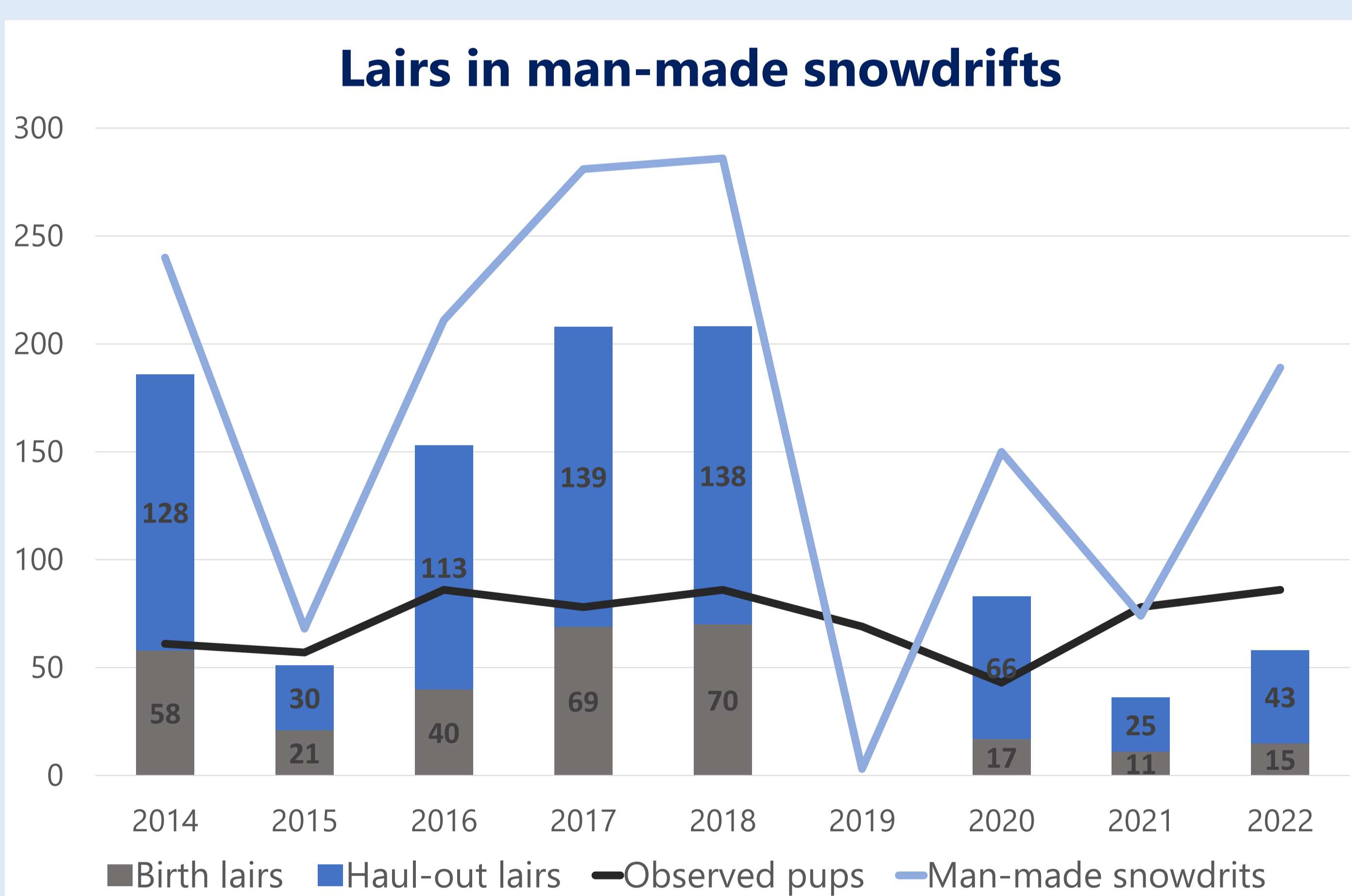


Fig. 2. Most of the observed pups have been born in man-made snowdrifts in mild winters.

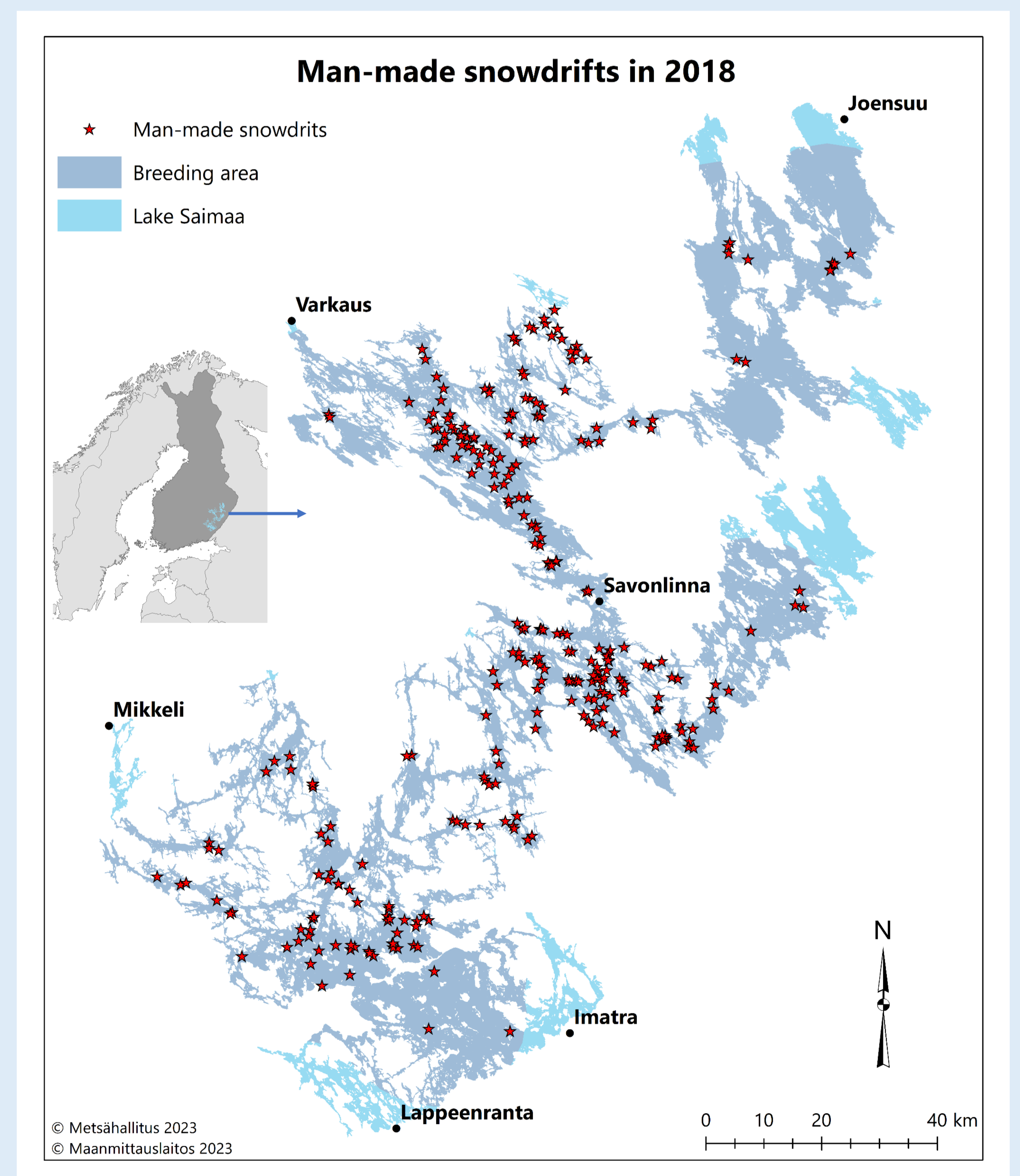


Fig. 3. Man-made snowdrifts are made in the whole breeding area.



The project has received funding from the LIFE Programme of the European Union. The material reflects the views by the authors, and the European Commission or the CINEA is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.