

# Population and conservation of the Saimaa ringed seal

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## Species

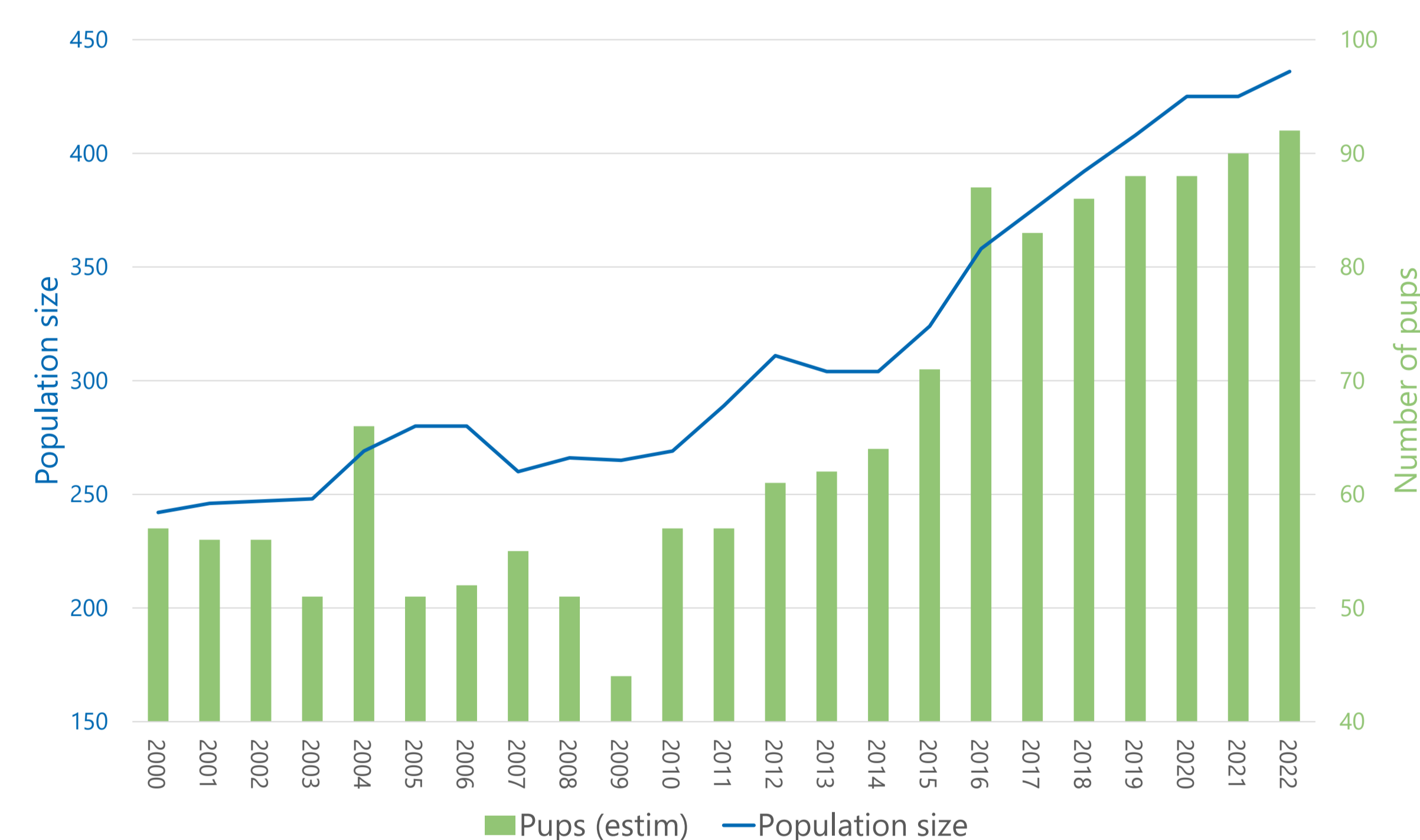
Saimaa ringed seal (*Pusa hispida saimensis*) inhabits freshwater Lake Saimaa in Finland (**fig. 1**).

- Relict of the last glacial period
- Endangered (IUCN)
- Endemic in Finland
- Dependent on ice and snow as a breeding habitat

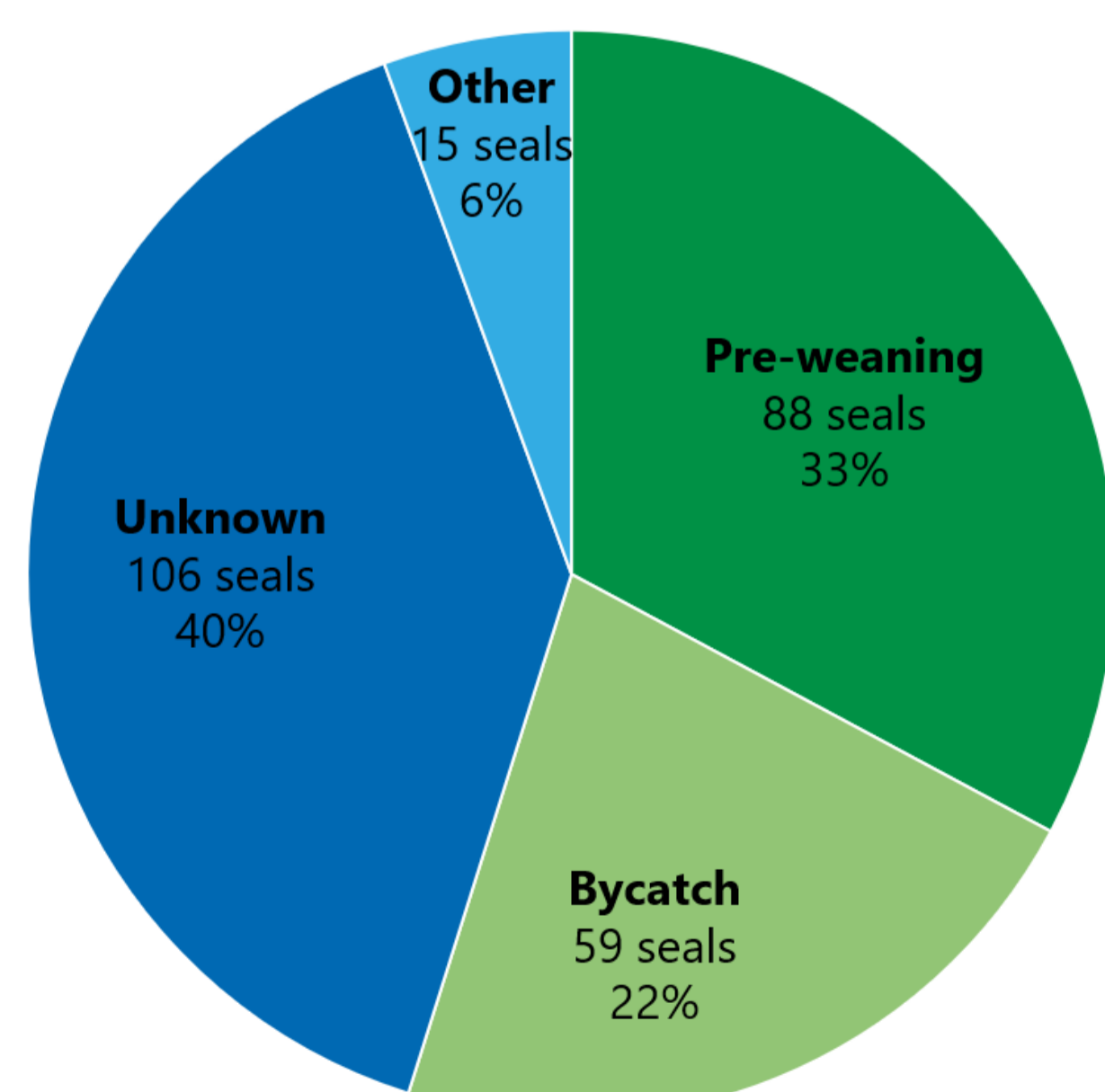
## Population

Estimated pristine population size around 4000 seals. At the beginning of the 1900s there were still over 1000 seals, but in the 1980s less than 200 seals were left.

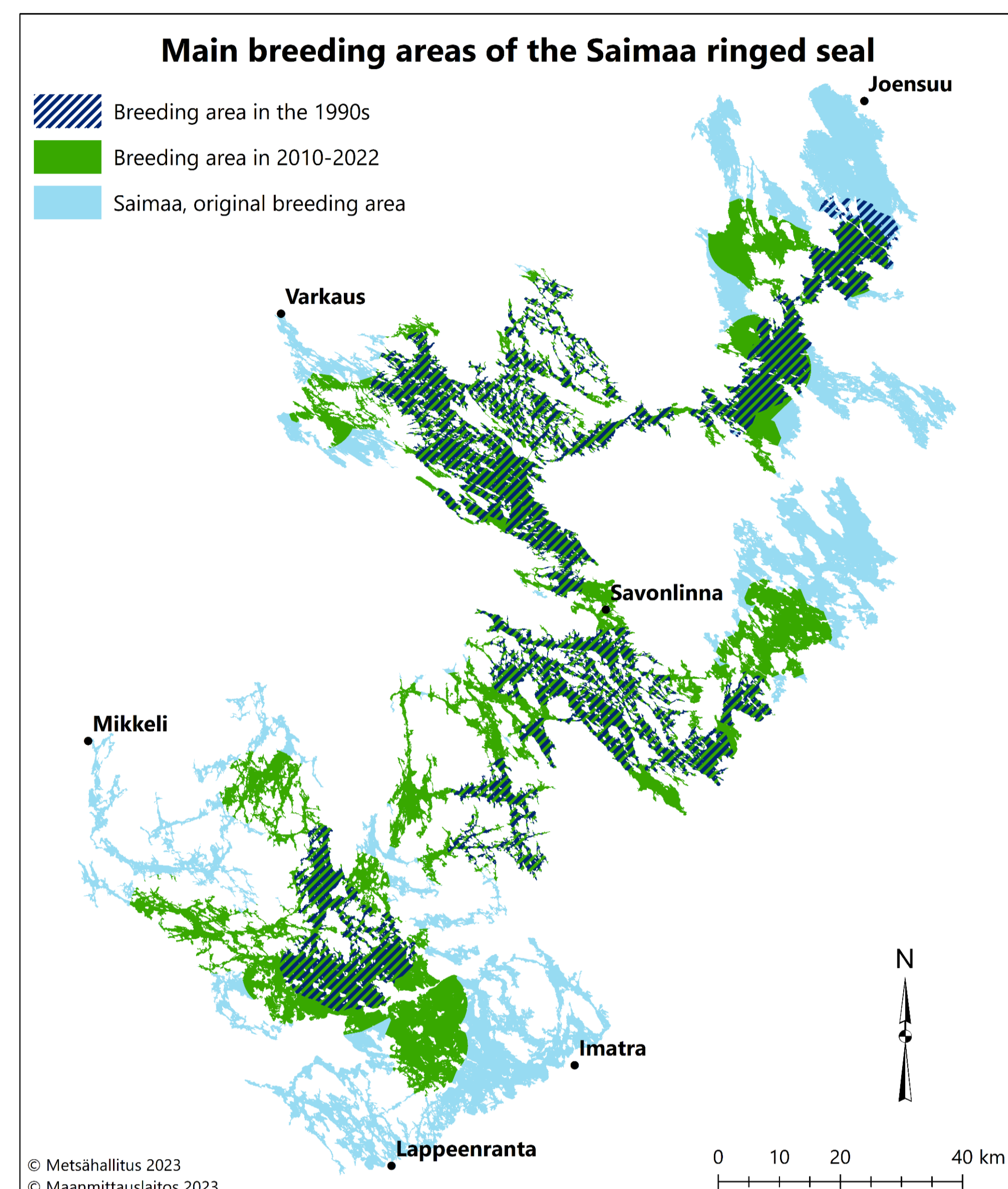
- ~440 seals, 90 pups annually (2022)
- Increased slowly (**fig. 2**)
- Re-inhabited old areas (**fig. 1**)



**Fig. 2.** Saimaa ringed seal population size and born pups in 2000-2022.



**Fig. 3.** Saimaa ringed seal mortality in 2011-2020 (N=268).



**Fig. 1.** Lake Saimaa and expansion of the main breeding areas of the Saimaa ringed seal since the 1990s.

## Threats

Decreased survival of young age classes hinders the recovery of the population (**fig. 3**).

- Bycatch
- Climate change
- Habitat loss & human-caused disturbance
- Low genetic diversity
- Small population size

## Conservation methods

Larger population size would ensure better prospects for the seal survival in a rapidly changing environment.

- Fishing restrictions
- Man-made snowdrifts & artificial nests
- Land use planning
- Seal translocations within Saimaa
- Information sharing



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