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Press Release

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[Bridges & Tunnels](#)

IMMEDIATE

Falcon Chicks Debut at Marine Parkway-Gil Hodges Memorial Bridge

Newborn Peregrine falcon chicks spent their first hours enjoying last week's fine early summer weather in a cozy nest atop the south tower on the Queens side of the Marine Parkway-Gil Hodges Memorial Bridge.

For several years running, the same female falcon and her mate have nested and raised chicks at the seaside crossing. "We are very careful to let nature take its course and leave the nest undisturbed," said John Ryder, General Manager for both the Marine Parkway and the Cross Bay Veterans Memorial Bridges based in the Rockaways. "The falcons keep coming back here to nest so they must find our bridge very hospitable!"

Several years ago when members of the maintenance crew first took note of the falcons they set up a box in a small never-used platform on the tower (installed as a gun turret during World-War II), which the falcons have since turned into a well appointed nest. When the falcons returned again earlier this spring, Bridge Maintenance Superintendent Carlton Cyrus, along with a wildlife biologist and falcon expert representing the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, ascended the 218-foot tall tower to unobtrusively check on the nest and whether any eggs or newborns were in residence. "We wear protective gear and are careful to keep a safe distance so the mother does not perceive us as a threat," explained Cyrus. They were greeted by the sight of two chicks, just days-old.

The chicks will grow quickly—especially their sharp claws; by the time the birds are three-weeks old their talons will have grown to the size as those of an adult falcon (nearly as large as an adult human hand). The new chicks will soon eat about four or five times a day, and their diet consists of small birds caught by their mother.

In the coming weeks they will begin to practice flying amid their perch atop the tower but will remain dependent on their mother for protection and food for another eight weeks; the father falcon remains on the scene to help his mate by gathering food but has a less prominent role in parenting than the larger (by 30%) and more aggressive female who guards the nest. Peregrine falcons, an endangered species as recently as 1999, have a lifespan up to 20 years.

City-based falcons seem to like building their nests atop bridges, church steeples and high-rise buildings since they historically live on high cliffs where they can spy prey and have open space to hunt. Agency personnel are always careful to avoid any work near nests during the falcons mating season (February-to-March), and work closely with wildlife professionals on efforts such as identification tagging.

In addition to hosting the falcons, the Marine-Parkway-Gil Hodges Memorial Bridge has average daily traffic of 23,000 vehicles. More than 7.9 million vehicles made the crossing in 2007.

MTA Bridges and Tunnels' facilities, which connect the five boroughs of New York City, are the Triborough, Throgs Neck, Bronx-Whitestone, Henry Hudson, Verrazano-Narrows, Cross Bay Veterans Memorial and Marine Parkway-Gil Hodges Bridges, and the Queens Midtown and Brooklyn-Battery Tunnels.

Photo captions: (photo credit: Carlton Cyrus):

#1: Days-old Peregrine falcon chicks huddle in nest atop the south (Queens-side) tower of the Marine Parkway-Gil Hodges Memorial Bridge. ([link](#))

#2: Mother falcon guarding her newborns nesting nearby. ([link](#))

#3: The Marine Parkway-Gil Hodges Memorial Bridge on a sunny day. ([link](#))