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Press Release

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[Bridges & Tunnels](#)

IMMEDIATE

Five Peregrine Falcon Chicks Hatch At Three MTA B & T Bridges

Three pairs of peregrine falcons are spreading their wings with joy after five new chicks hatched high atop the towers of the Verrazano–Narrows, Throgs Neck and Marine Parkway–Gil Hodges Memorial Bridges this season. Three new chicks were born at the Verrazano, one at the Throgs Neck and one at Marine Parkway–Gil Hodges Memorial.

Although no longer on the federal list of endangered species, peregrine falcons are still on the state endangered species list.

The chicks had their first close–ups taken when they were banded by a state volunteer wildlife expert this week. The process includes putting a metal band around their feet with numbers to identify them and track them as they grow and reproduce. The Verrazano–Narrows falcons included two girls and a boy, while the Throgs Neck and Marine Parkway–Gil Hodges each had a boy. The Throgs Neck chick is the oldest of the group at four–weeks. The other four hatched during the first week in May and are now three–weeks–old.

"The falcons have been on this bridge longer than I have and I've been here 28 years," said Maintenance Superintendent William McCann, who is the keeper of the nest at the Verrazano. Not that there is much keeping to do since the goal is to provide the falcons a place to nest, keep them away from bridge maintenance activities and then leave them alone as much as possible, McCann said.

The falcons' original box nest was underneath the lower level roadway until 2000 when a paint project was started and containment shrouds were put up. "We didn't want the falcons to leave altogether so we built one box atop the Brooklyn tower and another atop the Brooklyn pedestal and gave them a choice," McCann said. They chose the tower with its sweeping view of New York Bay from 693–feet above the water, and have returned each mating season.

The same is true at the Throgs Neck where the peregrine nesting box was moved from the 360–foot Queens tower to the matching Bronx tower during a 2007 painting project. "We have a good relationship with the falcons because we're like absentee landlords," said Throgs Neck Maintenance Superintendent Ray Higgins. "We set them up with a nice place to live and then try not to bother them."

But the falcon couple at Marine Parkway has the most historical digs by far. The nesting box, which is located 215–feet above the water on the Rockaway side of the bridge, is inside an old gun turret that was installed during World War II. "Next year they'll get an upgrade because the wood inside the original box is badly split and it is dangerous for the chicks," said Rockaway Maintenance Superintendent Carlton Cyrus.

City falcons typically like to nest atop bridges, church steeples and high–rise buildings because these spots provide an excellent vantage point for hunting prey, including pigeons and small birds. In 2008, the State Department of Conservation documented 67 pairs of peregrine falcons living in New York City.

The baby birds grow quickly. At three–weeks their talons are the size of an adult human hand, and they eat four or five times a day. They will begin to practice flying from atop the bridge towers in the next two–weeks and by July will leave for unknown destinations.

MTA Bridges and Tunnels' facilities, which connect the five boroughs of New York City, are the Robert F. Kennedy, 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.



Bouncing baby boy falcon chick born atop the Throgs Neck Bridge.



Trio of peregrine chicks in their nesting box at the top the Verrazano–Narrows Bridge.



Baby peregrine falcon inside his nest at Marine Parkway-Gil Hodges Memorial Bridge.