

# Best laid plans: Network Rail amends bridge refurbishment work after protected birds found nesting in tower

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Network Rail has had to make changes to planned refurbishment works on the Grade II listed Britannia Bridge, in North Wales, after a pair of peregrine falcons were found to be calling it home.

The rare and protected birds were spotted, by a member of the public, flying back and forth to the top of the middle tower of the bridge – which links Anglesey and the mainland of Wales across the Menai Strait.

With restoration works planned on all three towers, Network Rail quickly teamed up with Ecological Consultants, Whitcher Wildlife Ltd, to get advice on how to best protect the falcons.

“After a few visits to the bridge, it soon became clear that a solitary peregrine falcon was roosting, preening and hunting from the central tower”, James Campbell, Ecological Consultant at Whitcher Wildlife Ltd said.

“It was displaying the typical field signs of an adult male, defending the nesting site and tending to feed

the female peregrine falcon on the nest.

“Falcons are usually found nesting in high-up places, like cliff tops or tall buildings, but this is the first time I have been called out to monitor these magnificent and rare birds nesting in the tower of a bridge.

“We are working closely with Network Rail to continue to monitor the birds over the next few months, with work on the central tower now paused until the young peregrines have fledged the nest, later in the year.”

Following advice from the ecologist and Natural Resources Wales, the restoration work will continue on Anglesey and Caernarfon towers with scaffolding now being erected in preparation for the main work to begin next month.

Network Rail project manager, Peter Caulfield, said: “As with all of our projects, we are very conscious of the impact our work might have on the local environment and we are trying to keep any disruption to a minimum.

“Given the national importance of the birds, we can’t risk disturbing them, so we have postponed the work on the central Britannia tower until later in the year.

“This is an iconic bridge which provides a vital road and rail link between Anglesey and mainland Wales. Once complete, our work on the towers will ensure the bridge remains safe and reliable, helping to preserve it for years to come.”

In May, support beams made from fibre-reinforced plastic (FRP), will begin to be hoisted into position under the stone lintels located at the top of the two towers. The work is being carried out, on behalf of Network Rail, by AmcoGiffen. This additional support for the lintels will ensure the bridge can continue to provide a safe and reliable transport link for this key route.

*Photo credit: Network Rail*