

**Charles H. Rogers Wildlife Refuge Birds, Then and Now  
(Some random takes)**

1. Charles Rogers once told me that Red-tailed Hawks were more common than Red-tailed Hawks in the Princeton area and I recall several times seeing one perched in a tree in the lower marsh although my computer record of birds in the 60s only shows one entry and that was 10 May 1964 when the area was called “the pumping station.” But the computer entry was taken from a bird calendar.
2. The fallout of warblers, vireos and other migrating passerines in the refuge was most impressive in the 60s into the late 70s. Just taking the above date, we saw in the morning the following birds at the pumping station: Blackburnian, Blue-winged, Tennessee, Chestnut-sided, Wilson’s, Myrtle, Magnolia, Yellow, Black and White, Canada, Parula, Bay-breasted, Black-throated Blue warblers plus Ovenbird, A. Redstart, “Maryland” Yellow-throat and Blackpoll. Also seen amongst others were Scarlet Tanager, Black-billed cuckoo, Yellow-throated Vireo and Gray-cheeked Thrush. And on 11 May 1968 at the pumping station we had 17 warblers.
3. Three days earlier on 7 May 1964 before starting work at the University we saw ten warblers that included a Nashville Warbler. (Note that in the 60s and 70s if we were in town in late April through mid-May during the work week, we would often bird just in the Refuge in the morning and leave the area about 8:30 a.m. and often) Even as late as 17 or 18 May 1978, we stopped at the Refuge in mid-morning en route to North Carolina’s Outer Banks with a non-birder Jim Merritt who was at the University to go on a pelagic trip. Jim, a writer, a lover of nature and a well-known trout fisherman was going along with us to do a story on the pelagic trip. The warbler fallout at the Refuge was simply unbelievable. So unbelievable that it was extremely difficult to leave the small area located almost 50 yards down the dirt road from the Charles H. Rogers sign. (Since 2002 or 2003 it is lucky if we see six warbler species in May so we now rarely go out in the morning. And even we include the Institute Woods seeing over ten different warblers requires much effort.)
4. Charles H. Rogers once told me that the Orchard Oriole was the more common bird in the Refuge between it and the Baltimore Oriole. But that had changed before we arrived in Princeton in Oct. 1962 when the Orchard Oriole became a rarity. Now we are seeing Orchard Orioles in May on a regular basis although still outnumbered by the Baltimore.

5. The Checklist of Birds compiled by R. J. Blicharz probably has number of errors. For example, it shows the Black-capped Chickadee as common in the winter, spring and fall. Granted, the north-south dividing line between it and the Carolina Chickadee was perhaps then located in the greater Princeton area, I doubt if the Black-capped was ever common here in the Refuge (perhaps uncommon). It certainly is not now as the dividing line has moved further north (yet there are still hybrids in Princeton).
6. The Ring-necked Pheasant use to be seen or heard in the Refuge almost throughout the year up into the 70s but no more. In fact, the pheasant is getting difficult to see throughout New Jersey -- the reason: development and the fact that the state no longer seems to be reintroducing them from pheasant farms. Now the Wild Turkey receives most of the state's game bird attention. The state, however, still reintroduces Bobwhites whose numbers are also way down in many areas. And it should no longer appear on our Refuge checklist.
7. Migrant shorebird species in the spring have improved in the refuge but this is partly reflected on water levels being down during the periods when the pump was not working. For example, the checklist doesn't show either of the yellowlegs.
8. Now the variety of breeding birds is also down. Take the *Empidonax* flycatchers. The Least Flycatcher is now seen only in migration but it use to be a dependable breeder just off the path to the pump house out into the marsh. After it stopped breeding, the Willow Flycatcher became a dependable breeder in the lower marsh but it, too, stopped breeding (probably 1997). Breeding warbler numbers are down, particularly the American Redstart and Yellow Warbler. Eastern Towhees were once common breeders around the Refuge and at least two were within the boundaries but no more.
9. Perhaps the old checklist is correct showing Ring-billed Gulls as breeders, but if so, it had to be many, many years ago.