Welcome! Open from Sunrise to Sunset. Please sign in before exploring.

Trail Wood is the former home of Edwin Way Teale and his wife Nellie. Edwin was a well-known and influential author of 27 original books on natural history, science, and photography. He edited or added contextual material to an additional 7 books, including Thoreau’s Walden and selections from John Muir and Jean Henri Fabre. Edwin declared himself a naturalist at the young age of nine. In 1923 he married Nellie Imogene Donovan, whom he met while the two attended Earlham College. Nellie was Edwin’s equal as a naturalist and an indispensable companion in all projects and adventures. They shared a life-long love of nature and each other.

Edwin began his career as a staff writer for Popular Science Monthly magazine in 1928, writing and illustrating, with photographs, articles on everything from homing pigeons to dirigible air stations of the future. He spent 13 years working for Popular Science, honing his skills both as a writer and photographer. In 1937, he published his first natural history book, Grassroot Jungles. In it, he detailed the lives of common insects and included 130 macro photographs, the quality of which astonished the book’s readership. Teale pioneered the technique of placing insects in the refrigerator before photographing them, yielding more cooperative and stationary subjects. Grassroot Jungles was lauded on the front page of the New York Times Review of Books, both for its writing and photography, making Edwin a national figure. Near Horizons: The Story of an Insect Garden followed two years later. The latter book won the John Burroughs Award for Distinguished Natural History Writing, further solidifying Edwin’s reputation.

On October 15, 1941, Edwin left Popular Science to pursue a freelance writing career. Thereafter, he and Nellie celebrated October 15th as their own personal Independence Day. Edwin’s accessible style, extensive knowledge, and unquenchable curiosity enabled his success. He is best known for his four-book series on the American seasons: North with the Spring, Journey into Summer, Autumn Across America, and Wandering Through Winter. All of his books are now out of print, but recent reprints of the American Seasons quartet, A Naturalist Buys An Old Farm, and Dune Boy are available for purchase. Copies of his books can also be found at your library or bought from used bookstores and online retailers.

In 1959, the Teales left their home in Baldwin, Long Island to escape the crush of humanity, moving to the tranquility of Trail Wood. Here they spent the rest of their lives examining every feature of the 156 acres they affectionately called “our Eden.” They named each trail, pasture, and corner so they could share the news of their daily rambles if they went out separately. Edwin had the habit – more common in the mid-twentieth century – of compounding nouns in less typical ways. Examples at Trail Wood include North Boulderfield, Nellie’s Summerhouse, and Starfield Pasture. Edwin’s original naming of sites and trails has been maintained on all sanctuary signage. Additionally, all black and white photographs featured on the kiosk signage were taken by Edwin or Nellie during the Teales’ time at Trail Wood unless specified otherwise.

Ten of Mr. Teale’s books were written here at Trail Wood, including his 1966 Pulitzer Prize winner, Wandering Through Winter—the first natural history text to win a Pulitzer during the twentieth century. His last two books published during his lifetime, A Naturalist Buys An Old Farm and A Walk Through the Year, feature Trail Wood as their subject.

Edwin died of prostate cancer on October 18th, 1980. His study remains as he left it in 1980, per Nellie’s request. In 1981, she deeded Trail Wood to the Connecticut Audubon Society, as she and Edwin had agreed to do. Nellie lived here for 13 years after Edwin’s death. She died in 1993.

Trail Wood is managed by the Connecticut Audubon Society with help of many volunteers. The Dodd Research Center on the University of Connecticut campus in Storrs houses the extensive Teale Papers. In the late 1990s, Connecticut Audubon purchased an additional 11 acres abutting the sanctuary and received one acre in donation, growing the sanctuary to 168 acres.

To read all of the kiosks and for more information on Trail Wood, please visit www.ctaudubon.org/trail-wood

Images courtesy of Virginia Wild, Ken Voorhees, and Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries.

Kiosk Locations:
1. Monument Pasture
2. Brushpile Study
3. Starfield Pasture
4. Nellie’s Summerhouse
5. Teale’s Writing Cabin
6. Seven Springs Swamp
7. Grand Junction
8. Beaver Pond
9. Boulderfield
10. North Woods

*The Connecticut Audubon Society has maintained the original site and trail names created by the Teales.