

Mariposas del Mundo

by Gabe LePage

At a time when COVID-19 has driven so many indoors, a group of neighbors from Fair Haven Heights worked this summer with the Urban Resources Initiative to create a patch of welcome for the smallest of American travelers: butterflies. The garden is found on the corner of Hemingway and Eastern Streets, across from the Bella Vista Apartments. In honor of the Spanish speakers in the group and the distances butterflies travel from Mexico to reach New Haven, the Greenspace group, originally referred to as the Hemingway Butterfly Garden, was renamed “Mariposas del Mundo,” or “Butterflies of the World.”

Led by Kat Calhoun, an active member of the Quinnipiac East Management Team who lives near the garden, the Mariposas del Mundo Greenspace group transformed about 400 sq ft of grass on the Hemingway/Eastern corner into a certified habitat for several butterfly species, including Monarchs and Eastern Swallowtails. A stream runs through that city lot, making it impossible to be developed. The banks were covered with 6ft high, very invasive Japanese Knotweed, as well as other invasive vines like Oriental Bittersweet and Porcelain Berry. Visionary Calhoun looked across the street at all the grass and knotweed and saw the potential for a total transformation.



The butterfly garden in process, with plants and soil from URI.

The idea did not start with her, but grew out of a community encounter with public art. Some months before the pandemic, the members of the Quinnipiac East Management Team were impressed by a mural of a large, blue butterfly painted by JoAnn Moran on the Lots of Fish, Eco-Art building at 12 E. Grand Ave. Everyone loved the butterfly. When it was moved to become a permanent mural at a school, the community began to consider, “What about the real butterflies? Where will they go?” A groundswell of interest ensued to make the Quinnipiac neighborhood a home to butterflies of all types.

Calhoun reached out to URI to participate in our Greenspace Program, where we supply plants, soil, and mulch. We work with community groups on outreach, planning, and implementation to fulfill visions of ecological restoration. URI Interns Tommy Martin and I joined in online meetings while we waited for formal permission to work together in person.



Peter Davis receives his Monarch-level Butterfly award from Kat Calhoun at our end-of-the-season celebration.

The first challenges involved getting permission to use the land and gaining access to water. A quick phone call by URI Associate Director Chris Ozyck to Bill Carone of Public Works secured permission to use the space, with some design guidelines to keep mowing simple for the city. We then tested the water from the creek for salt to make sure it was tolerable for the plants.

The next stage was design. Kat Calhoun partnered with two New Haven residents with gardening experience, Sylvia and Sonia, to think through what plants were necessary to support the butterflies. We needed host plants for caterpillars and their chrysalises and nectar plants for the adults. Many species of butterfly can only survive on a single species or genus of plant for their larval stage. Monarchs, for example, rely entirely on species of Milkweed for their caterpillars to reach adulthood. The cottonwoods already on the property are excellent host plants for Viceroy, Mourning Cloak, and the Eastern Tiger Swallowtail caterpillars. With help from Sylvia’s master list, we picked out plants for the garden that covered the entire lifecycle of several butterfly species. We also reached out to Dr. Kim Stoner from the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station for a list of native flowering plants, to be sure we had flowers blooming throughout the growing season. With all of these components, we knew we could prepare a good home for butterflies and a good view for Bella Vista.

During the summer, we spread nine yards of topsoil over the grass in a semicircle arc—easy to mow around—and planted many species of perennials. Helping us was Peter Davis, a resident of Bella Vista who volunteers for the city as a River Keeper by cleaning up streams and rivers and removing invasive species across New Haven. He led the charge to chop down a large amount of knotweed growing by the stream, and was essential to helping carry water and move materials. We had 5-15 people show up every Friday afternoon, with a total of over 30 volunteers, including five hardworking kids. Once the soil was spread, we planted Anise Hyssop, Milkweed, Coreopsis, Asters, Catmint,



Kat Calhoun marks out the area we are granted permission to use by the city.

Bee Balm, Joe Pye Weed, and Echinacea, to name a few, and lined the back row with six Inkberry bushes that will remain green through the winter.

This garden, meant to provide a refuge for butterflies and the beauty they embody, was only made possible by a group of citizens coming together in a time of crisis to care for a world we want to see in the future and to bring that world into being. Neighbors often walked by and asked what we were doing. Cars honked as we were working. The garden not only welcomed butterflies and bees, but also created a place of connection for people.

We finished with a celebration. Kat Calhoun made butterfly-themed awards for every volunteer who came out, and hosted an award ceremony in the garden, where she passed out butterfly toys and decorations. Dr. Kim Stoner, from the Ag Station, spoke briefly on butterfly lifecycles. We applauded one another as we received our rewards, and finished by releasing our wind-up butterfly toys to fly in the air. We chatted afterward and admired all the flowers we had planted.

Community Greenspaces thrive on relationships and community members becoming aware of common problems—represented by the disappearing butterflies—and proposing common solutions. URI would like to sincerely thank Kat Calhoun and the Mariposas del Mundo Greenspace group for bringing these issues before the community and creating a public space for people to come together and preserve the movements of beauty that make this world our home.

The Sparrow Squad

by Caroline (Caro) Scanlan

On a busy corner in Newhallville, four sparrows take to the air with grace and power — one can practically feel the breeze from the flap of their wings. The Sparrow Squadron — the latest public mural installation by New Haven-based artist Kwadwo Adae — was recently completed at the intersection of Dixwell and Division in the Newhallville neighborhood.

I met Kwadwo for the first time on September 18, at the installation of one of New Haven's new Black Lives Matter murals on Bassett Street. Kwadwo, the mural designer, was orchestrating an all-day, community volunteer painting event. Wearing his trademark paint-splattered artist coat and gliding between neighbors with rollers and paintbrushes, he stood out in a joyful crowd. I approached him to introduce myself (we had corresponded by email over the summer to coordinate a tree planting in front of Adae Fine Art Academy, his plant-filled State Street community art school) and thank Kwadwo for being a tree steward.

During our conversation, Kwadwo explained he was nearly done with another mural in the neighborhood — a flock of sparrows on the wall of Moe's Market — and he was excited to have trees integrated into the final mural design. One month later, on a gray and drizzly morning in October, URI's GreenSkills team had the privilege of planting four new trees — two serviceberries, a hackberry, and a pink flowering dogwood — to complement the birds in flight.

While striking in their own right, the sparrows evoke a difficult story. As Kwadwo writes on his website, "The Sparrow Squadron mural was created in response to an egregious incident of gun violence where Yale University Police Officer Terrance Pollock and Hamden Police Officer Devin Eaton fired a total of sixteen bullets into the car of Stephanie Washington and Paul Witherspoon III, an unarmed black couple [in spring of 2019]. The incident occurred 0.2 miles away from [the wall where the sparrows are painted]."

The mural was started in summer 2019, but its significance has only amplified since the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor earlier this summer and the global protests and shifts in public consciousness that followed. In describing the symbolism of the sparrows, Adae writes, "Birds are representative of peace and freedom, two important aspects of life that police gun violence robs from a community. Sparrows are featured as they are small, often overlooked birds that are beautiful and ubiquitous to the community."

The tree species were chosen by Kwadwo with attention and care. "The yellows of the hackberry and the red orange tones of the serviceberries... against the deep umber background of the mural every autumn" were thrilling to imagine. In de-



Artist and tree steward Kwadwo Adae visits with URI's tree planting team, explaining the story and significance of the "Sparrow Squadron" public mural at Dixwell and Division.

scribing his excitement about the serviceberry trees in particular, Kwadwo writes, "The flowers would support local pollinators and the [berries] would support many different species of birds. The fact that they are edible is an enormous plus.... Introducing a tree with edible berries in an urban setting has the potential to increase youth interest in interacting and engagement with trees."

As the rain drizzled on and the sky darkened before an afternoon downpour, URI's planting team stood in front of the mural, their attention captured by Kwadwo as he shared the story behind the sparrows and the significance of painting public murals in neighborhoods across New Haven. It has always been important for him to give back to the community, he explained, and to invest his care and energy into the city's predominantly Black and Brown neighborhoods.

William Tisdale, our planting-crew leader, explained that he had a family member who had lived right around the corner for years, pointing to the blue building one door down from Moe's Market. Jonathan Geneste, a team member from Emerge, chimed in that he, too, had family nearby and that he had spent a few years living a few blocks away. Kwadwo seemed heartened to learn that members of our team had a deep connection to this place, that the mural and the tree planting felt close to home. "And the owner of the market, [Bachar Jandali], we should be grateful for him, too," Will chimed in. "He didn't have to agree to have the mural painted on his building or to provide the water for the trees" — reminding us of the web of relationships that supports community projects like these.

As we packed up our trucks and got ready to leave

the planting site that day, I positioned a "Request A Free Tree" sign right next to the flowering dogwood, with the hopes that nearby residents may feel inspired to ask for a tree of their own. A few days later, the phone rang, and it was Charlene. "I live on Dixwell, just up from the bus stop at Division. There's a sign about free trees. My son is turning nine years old this weekend, and for his birthday, he says he would like a new tree out front." Not only that, he wanted his friends to know they could have one, too. Malachi became our youngest tree ambassador that weekend, passing out tree-request postcards to the 20 attendees of his ninth birthday party. A few weeks later, a new trident maple was planted in front of Charlene and Malachi's Dixwell Avenue home.

The sparrows and their new arboreal companions, with a call for freedom and cultivating our sometimes unnoticed but always present connection with the natural world, had already begun to spread tree fever through the neighborhood. Hopefully much-needed peace and healing, too. And who knows — maybe Malachi will be one of the young folks trying their first serviceberry fruit next July.

For more information about Kwadwo Adae and his work, you can visit his website (kwadwoadae.com) or follow him on Instagram (@[kwadwoadae](https://www.instagram.com/kwadwoadae))

Note: This year, URI has been investing in Tree Ambassadors across New Haven, thanks to generous support from CT Green Fund. If you or someone you know is interested in organizing your neighborhood to have more free trees planted by our GreenSkills team, we can get you set up with all the materials you need!