

community forum

Turn your fear into fascination with these tips

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In a famous scene from *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), Dorothy, Tin Man, and Scarecrow express fear as they are about to enter a forest.

Dorothy: "I don't like this forest. It's dark and creepy. Do you suppose we will meet any wild animals?" To overcome fear, they join arms and begin to chant: "Lions, and tigers, and bears, oh my!"

If you grew up on a Kansas farm like Dorothy did, your first experience in a forest might inspire fear. Your imagination might run wild — fuelled by stories of dangerous creatures.

There is no shortage of stories that engender fear of the natural world. From classic horror films like *The Birds* to cautionary tales like Little Red Riding Hood, scary stories abound in books, on television, and on the internet. Even news coverage about wildlife can create fear.

Fear incites us to either avoid or attack the object of our fear. The "fight or flight" response is instinctive. It is meant to protect us from harm.

Fear often influences our behaviour. We may trim our lawns and avoid tall grasses to



Photo by Michele Kading

There are no venomous snakes in Manitoba, so no need to worry about a poisonous bite from, say, a garter snake (pictured).

avoid wood ticks. We may clear underbrush where snakes, mice, and other animals hide. We may use poisons to kill mosquitoes, wasps, and other species we fear. We may avoid parks because we are scared of bugs, bats, or bears. We may not swim in lakes because we are afraid of leeches.

To break this cycle, recognize when unfounded fear is preventing you from experiencing the wonder and beauty of nature. Learn about the species that you fear. Is your fear based on fact or fiction? Here are a few facts that may help you put fear in perspective.

- There are no vampire bats or venomous snakes in Manitoba;

- Dragonflies bite mosquitoes, not people;
- Lady beetles are harmless;
- Bees and wasps sting in defence — so don't swat them;
- Toads produce a poison that irritates the eyes of predators;
- Swallows will "dive-bomb" predators to defend their nests and young.

Turn your fear into fascination by taking a walk along the Seine River. Lady beetles, dragonflies, and birds. Enjoy!

Michele Kading is a community correspondent for St. Vital and the executive director of Save Our Seine — www.saveourseine.com