



Photo by Michele Kading

Dragonflies are mosquito-eating machines.

The watery world of the Seine River is full of life



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Some of my favourite books as a child were those that led me to imagine the natural world from the perspective of other species. As adults, we look at the world with less imaginative eyes. We seldom consider how our actions affect other creatures.

As every child who has explored a stream or wetland knows, watery places are filled with life. When we look below the surface, we find a magical place. The names of the creatures spark our imaginations. There are damsels, dragons, giants, nymphs and fairies. There are water tigers, 'blood-suckers,' backswimmers, and boatmen. Some of these creatures emerge from the water as adults to mate and lay eggs (damselflies, dragonflies, 'fishflies' and mosquitoes). Others spend their whole lives under water.

Imagine the Seine River from their perspective. If the water quality worsens, they struggle to survive. They may die if the water becomes too warm, murky, or low in oxygen.

How does this happen?

When trees are cut along the river bank, there is less shade to keep the water cool. Warm water holds less oxygen. When trails are created by walkers and cyclists, loose soil

washes into the river — making it murky. Nutrients from fertilizer, leaves, soaps, or sewage are carried down storm drains into the river — causing algae to form thick, impenetrable mats. This makes it difficult for tiny creatures to swim. When algae mats die, decomposers use up the oxygen in the water. Fish and other oxygen-sensitive creatures may die.

Everything that goes down Winnipeg's storm drains affects the river and its inhabitants. What might enter the watery world from our streets and yards? Gas or oil from a leaky car? This forms a layer on the water that interferes with creatures' ability to obtain oxygen. De-icing salt? This changes the chemistry of the water. Pesticides? These chemicals kill aquatic insects. Algicides from swimming pools or ornamental ponds? These kill algae in the river and this reduces oxygen levels.

On Sun., Aug. 16, join SOS for a bike ride to explore the trails and parks of south St. Vital. As you travel the trails along the Seine and Red rivers watch for the huge pipes that empty into the river. Look for the storm drains on the streets and consider the creatures that live in the river at the other end of the pipe. How do our daily decisions affect their watery world?

Michele Kading is a community correspondent for St. Vital and the executive director for Save Our Seine. Go to www.saveourseine.com for details of these and other 25th anniversary events.