People’s fear of the wilds is largely motivated by a broader fear of the unknown. But we can’t ignore the space outside our cities, because it will find its way inside…mainly the spider eyeballing you in the corner of your room as you read this.

I try not to judge people who are afraid of spiders, because there was a point in my life where I was afraid of them too. When you’re a kid, you learn about spiders through movies and TV, and once you’re taught to fear them the adults around you condition you to reinforce that feeling. But as I came of age, I decided that I didn’t want to be afraid anymore. And in that process, I realized that maybe I shouldn’t have been afraid to begin with. I learned that spiders aren’t the aggressive threat I thought they were and are just trying to live their lives just like we are. Only that the scope of their world is inconceivably more terrifying than ours. In fact, I learned that most spiders I’ll encounter are incapable of causing me much harm at all. So what taught me to be so scared of them?

I think that, when you’re young, you are mainly taught to think what other people think. And other people watched the news.

The bias in reporting of ecological topics is less talked of in the broader discussion of mainstream media bias, but it’s very prevalent. This is because generally as a society, we just like large and charismatic mammals, and dislike bugs. The media we consume is just a reflection of these attitudes, and the cycle continues.

My since my awakening per say, I’ve been trying to think of how I could help other people break down this fear. A tall order I know, as I imagine most people have little interest in even doing so, but that won’t stop me from trying.

I stumbled upon a dataset by Mammola et al. (2022) about the very thing I wish people would think more about. It's tabular compilation of news articles from around the world all about spiders, each row containing detailed info about what biases it may contain. It was the exact thing I wish more people would think about, so I made like a jumping spider and pounced on the opportunity to visualize it.

The dataset had a lot of information and allowed many possible questions to answer. At first I thought maybe I would visualize bias by country, or maybe bias by year. But the reality is that I just want you, reader, to think about how your impression of spiders might not even be your own. I have no delusions that you will overcome your fear just by reading this, doing so is a whole process. But my goal for you maybe, is to consider if you should.