

A conspicuous cricket in the commode



Highland Views
Chris Highland
Guest columnist

Have you ever noticed that most animals in the wild are secretive, stealthy, silent? If you think about it, many wild creatures seem to spend their entire lives trying to hide. I find that amazing, and potentially a great lesson for us—the “look at me and see how great and powerful I am” species.

This morning I found a cricket looking up at me from the toilet. Sorry if that’s “TMI,” (too much information), but I was both startled and curious. I used a cleaning brush to lift it out and it hopped to hide in a corner. I left it there. Why not share the bathroom with

a cricket?

Throughout the day I thought about that cricket. How did it get in my bathroom? What was it doing in the toilet bowl? Why was it hiding the whole day in a corner where I knew it was there but it thought—we can assume—I didn’t know?

If it’s true that most wild things hide, from each other, predators, humans, we can let them be, not disturb them, or join those scientific investigators who seek them out to learn.

Once, on a rainy hike in the California hills, I counted 97 newts on a trail. Not by the trail or near the trail, right on the trail. I either watched them slowly plod along, or helped them move off the path. Normally I wouldn’t touch such fragile creatures, but I was aware that many other hikers would be stomping along at any time. So I gently removed each one—97 defenseless salamanders. Later, as I was driving away, I noticed

other hikers and mountain bikers heading up that trail. I wished the newts well, with the knowledge that some would not be able to hide in time.

Creatures like those newts don’t seem to know they need to hide, or how to become invisible, or protect themselves from human eyes. Add to this the fact that most of us never notice or care to see them anyway. We step on them, drive over them or ignore their presence. No wonder they try to hide from us, especially during daylight hours.

Think of bacteria, mites, viruses. So small they don’t need to hide. Sentient or not, they share our living spaces and our bodies too. Consider spiders, flies, beetles, ants, crickets. We may not see most of them, but in many ways we’re living in their world, not the other way around.

See HIGHLAND, Page 2D

Highland

Continued from Page 1D

In religious history there are stories of people who hide—usually those who feel unseen already—like Adam and Eve in a garden, Elijah in a mountain cave, Zacchaeus in a tree. And divine figures playing a kind of holy hide-and-seek: Moses in the river weeds, Buddha in the forest, Krishna in a chariot, Jesus in a garden grove. In these precarious times, even the ones we think of as great and powerful, reveal fragile humanity (vulnerable divinity?).

What are we hiding from? Our own nature? Nature itself? Is this out of fear or merely because we don't want to see things that disturb us, annoy us, cause us to take a closer look at the fact that we can't hide? Do

we feel threatened? Do they? What happens when fear meets fear? Though millions are invisible to us, by our choice or theirs, we can't ignore the fact that they do exist, they do share the same planet with us, seen or unseen.

When religious scriptures speak of "revelation," what does this mean but a literal revealing of that which is hidden? Take the word "apocryphal" from "apocrypha" which means hidden (veiled books of wisdom). Who has access to what is hidden? Some claim "esoteric" knowledge available only to an inner circle of the enlightened with special "insider" knowledge to the divine mind.

When things or people who are long hidden are revealed or come to light, we may be stunned with terror or delight. We learn that microbes live on and in the human body, most are good, some can be bad. Animals may reveal themselves to us, on purpose or by accident

, and we react out of fear or curiosity, maybe with a desire to communicate somehow.

As for hidden, veiled, shadowed people, they may present an equally essential challenge, to our awareness, to our ability to actually see what or who is already there. Do we have the eyes to see?

When I was a chaplain on the streets with the unseen and unheard, I was always aware that most of the people I served were invisible, and often wanted to be, or needed to be. They were vulnerable, yet valuable to me.

Perhaps the cricket was asking me: Why do you hide?

Chris Highland served as a Protestant minister and interfaith chaplain for many years. He is a teacher, writer, freethinker and humanist celebrant. Chris and his wife Carol, a Presbyterian minister, live in Asheville. Learn more at chighland.com.