It has been another tough week. And the constant drumbeat of media, print, televised, or heard is both drawing me in and pushing me away. So, this week, one article to draw us toward COVID-19, and the rest to provide a little respite. Remember, this is a marathon, not a sprint.

“Two critical mutations in the bat coronavirus set us on the path to the COVID-19 pandemic. The first modified the structure of the spike-like structures that protrude from the virus. Those protrusions give the virus its family name: “Corona” means “crown” in Latin. The altered spikes allow the virus to latch onto a protein called ACE2, which lines the respiratory tract. The related virus responsible for the SARS epidemic employs a similar infection mechanism, as does another bat coronavirus that causes common colds in humans.

The second key mutation allowed the coronavirus to grow a protein dagger called a furin, which can slice through other proteins to make the virus bind tightly to throat and lung cells. The furin protein is what made the COVID-19 virus so infectious and deadly to humans. In that sense, SARS-CoV-2 is similar to anthrax and various bird flus that also rely on furins to carry out their infection.”

One of the best explanations of COVID-19 and the added treat of having been written by Robert Bazell, formerly of NBC news, so both an accomplished communicator and scientist. From
Many of us have seen the pictures of some lost civilizations, like the Cliff Palace in our own Mesa Verde National Park, depicted down below, on the right.

“These civilizations, with high population densities, commandeered vast raw resources—land, space, soil, water, nutrients—for the intensive cultivation of grain crops, and biodiversity was clobbered in the march of progress. They thrived for hundreds of years—until collapse was precipitated by the usual factor: their own too-muchness, the breaching of the limits of carrying capacity, their home overwhelmed.”

While this paragraph refers to our human enterprises, the substance of the article draws upon the life experience of those delightful rats with hooves, deer. What can we learn from the lives of deer?
“Since 1950, industry has produced more than 8.3 billion tonnes of plastic. Of this, 6.4 billion tonnes have ended up as waste, the vast majority originating in rich countries. Only 9 percent of this total has been ‘recycled’; another 12 percent has been incinerated. The rest has gone to landfills, or been left to its own devices. The cheapest of these plastics cannot be recycled at all; abandoned, the materials break down into microplastics, leaching persistent organic pollutants along the way. The ethos of endless growth is nurtured daily by the idea of disposability, and by media reports of expanding economies (good) or stagnating ones (bad). It’s a fantasy that feeds on twin figments: the planet is infinite, and discards disappear. Wastepickers in Cairo, Delhi, Durban, Rio and beyond know better. Their livelihoods depend on discards. It’s easy to dismiss the poorest of the poor as living in the past. It’s harder to acknowledge that, actually, they might be living in the future.”

From Aeon, Human crap

“People come away from nature walks happier than people walking a drab hallway. Hospital patients recover faster when they have a window with a view of greenery. A prominent study of public housing buildings in Chicago found notably less aggression and violence in ones with better views of greenery. In the 1980s, Japan began embracing “forest bathing” as a form of preventive health care and healing, and the government has pumped millions into studying the mental and physical effects of being in nature. It led officials to establish dozens of official therapy trails in Japan’s forests.

It makes a sort of evolutionary sense: Trees, for instance, signal to our ape brains safety from predators. The sound of a babbling brook indicates water.”

From Vox, Building a movement to preserve silence as a natural resource
