

A Darwinian Survival Guide: Hope for the Twenty-First Century

Daniel R. Brooks

Salvatore J. Agosta

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Timely, thought-provoking, and refreshingly optimistic, *A Darwinian Survival Guide* says that human beings must understand and apply the principles of evolution to survive climate change.

In this insightful book, field biologists Daniel R. Brooks and Salvatore J. Agosta emphasize that “survival of the fittest” is the antithesis of Charles Darwin’s model. As conditions change, they note, the “fittest” species are marginalized and must shift to more favorable locations or go extinct. Survivors are often misfits that occupy a “sloppy fitness space” but have the flexibility to adapt: “Whatever works, persists. Whatever doesn’t work, goes extinct.”

In a brilliant discussion about people’s relationship with nature, Brooks and Agosta resist the “neoprotectionism” that is popular in conservation biology—the idea that humans must protect nature by separating themselves from it or engineering it to a previous state that was “better.” The biosphere will survive climate change, they argue; some charismatic species may go extinct while others, such as the polar bear, may be more adaptable than expected. They detail restoration of a Costa Rican ecosystem where conservationists minimized efforts to “engineer” the resurging forest and recognized that people are part of nature.

The book also traces the paleoanthropology of human civilizations, arguing that humans took a wrong turn by establishing large, permanent settlements. While cities seemed to promise security and technological advances, they say, they also introduced a host of problems and prohibited easy migration as conditions changed. To survive climate change, then, humans must migrate away from threatened cities and abandon grow-at-all-costs economies, revitalizing rural areas and building moderate, localized economies. These enthusiastic proposals only touch on implications for national boundaries, division of labor, health care, transportation, and other institutions.

Applying the principles of evolution in thoughtful ways, *A Darwinian Survival Guide* tackles the complexities of climate change with creativity, optimism, and vision.

KRISTEN RABE (January / February 2024)

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