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[Home](#) > Nick Matzke, quote hunter

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[Glenn Branch](#) [2]

09.04.2009

[Nick Matzke, quote hunter](#) [3]

 **Nick Matzke**

Former NCSE staffer Nick Matzke found a source for a spurious Darwin quotation — and won a prize for it! The passage in question — "It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is most adaptable to change" — is due not to Darwin but apparently to Leon C. Megginson, Professor of Management and Marketing at Louisiana State University at Baton Rouge, who offered substantially similar statements, intended as paraphrases of Darwin, in two articles published in the 1960s. The Darwin Correspondence Project [comments](#) [4], "At some stage Megginson's paraphrase of Darwin, slightly recast, was turned into an actual quotation from *Origin*. That part of the story remains to be told, and we look forward to Nick finding out more."

Discussing his search for the source of the spurious quotation at The Panda's Thumb blog, Matzke [explained](#) [5], "The quote appears to start as a paraphrase; there is no evidence that Megginson initially intended this to be taken as an exact quote; rather, at some later stage, someone copied down the phrase (perhaps in lecture notes, for example), and then later assumed it was an actual quote of Darwin." He added, "The quote has apparently evolved over time to become shorter and pithier. I suspect that quotes that are shorter and more pithy have an 'adaptive advantage' in collections of inspirational quotes, motivational seminars, and similar venues which seem to be common habitats for the quote in the business world. I hereby dub this process 'pithification.'"

Matzke, who worked for NCSE from 2004 to 2007 and is presently a graduate student in the Department of Integrative Biology at the University of California, Berkeley, will receive a copy of volume 16 of *The Correspondence of Charles Darwin*. The search for the source of two other spurious Darwin quotations — "In the struggle for survival, the fittest win out at the expense of their rivals because they succeed in adapting themselves best to their environment" and "In the long history of humankind (and animal kind, too) those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed" — is still [continuing](#)

[6]. And anyone who is able to find a closer and earlier match for the "It is not the strongest of the species" quotation will still be eligible to win a prize from the Darwin Correspondence Project.

[General](#) [7]

[2009](#) [8]

[+ read](#) [3]

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Links

[1] <https://ncse.com/printpdf/13440>

[2] <https://ncse.com/users/glenn>

[3] <https://ncse.com/news/2009/09/nick-matzke-quote-hunter-005036>

[4] <http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/content/view/164/30/>

[5] <http://pandasthumb.org/archives/2009/09/survival-of-the-1.html>

[6] <http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/content/view/157/1/>

[7] <https://ncse.com/general>

[8] <https://ncse.com/news/2009>