

Book Review

THE GAME OF SPECIES. AN INTRODUCTION TO BIODIVERSITY.

J. S. López. Pelagic Publishing, 2022

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The Game of Species: An Introduction to Biodiversity offers a distinctive synthesis of evolutionary and ecological thought, presented through the powerful metaphor of a game. The “pieces” are species, the “boards” are ecological and evolutionary arenas, and the “rules” are the processes that generate and sustain diversity. This framing, at once playful and rigorous, provides an accessible yet sophisticated introduction to biodiversity science.

The book is an English-language adaptation and expansion of López’s earlier *El Juego de las Especies* (2019), originally published in Spanish. In revising the text for an international audience, the author has updated examples, integrated recent literature, and refined the pedagogical flow. The result is not merely a translation, but a thoughtful reworking that situates the book ideally within broader debates in biodiversity and conservation.

Each chapter builds progressively: from the origin of species (*On the Origin of Pieces*), to their ecological functions (*On the Roles of Pieces*), the environments that structure them (*On the Boards*), and the dynamic processes that animate them (*On the Dynamics of the Game*). The treatment of coevolution and the Red Queen hypothesis (Van Valen), the presentation of the classic framework of island biogeography (MacArthur & Wilson), and the discussion of adaptive radiations place the book firmly in the lineage of modern evolutionary ecology. Darwin’s legacy is present throughout, not in a purely historical sense but as an ongoing influence on how we ask and answer questions about the diversity of life.

One of the book’s strengths is its ability to convey complexity without resorting to unnecessary jargon. López explains why biodiversity is unevenly distributed across the planet, why extinction is as important as speciation, and why ecological interactions create functional rather than merely numerical diversity. The discussion is enriched by careful illustrations that serve not only as visual aids, but as integral components of the narrative. Inclusion of a glossary further enhances the accessibility of the text, making it particularly valuable for students and non-specialists who may be encountering these concepts for the first time.

At the same time, the book does not shy away from presenting the field’s major theoretical frameworks. Readers are introduced to the Red Queen hypothesis, island biogeography, ecological niches, keystone species, and functional diversity. These explanations are faithful to the original sources while presented in a way that highlights their continuing relevance. For evolutionary biologists, this balance of synthesis and pedagogy is particularly appealing: the text revisits familiar debates while offering a fresh metaphorical lens.

The closing chapters (*Redux* and *The Future of Life*) provide both a synthesis and a call to action. López emphasizes that understanding biodiversity as a game entails recognizing our own disruptive role as players who alter the rules. The urgency of conservation emerges as a natural consequence of the scientific narrative, rather than as a moral afterthought.

The intended audience is broad: undergraduate and graduate students in biology will find it an accessible entry point; educators will appreciate its clarity and illustrative richness; and professionals will enjoy the reflective value of revisiting foundational questions. It also works as a piece of high-level science communication for readers outside academia, who will find in it both intellectual stimulation and aesthetic pleasure.

If there is a limitation, it is the book’s relatively cursory treatment of microbial diversity. This gap is acknowledged by the author from the outset. Still, the book’s candor about its scope, its elegant prose, and its integration of illustration and glossary compensate amply for this omission.

In conclusion, *The Game of Species* is a lucid, engaging, and beautifully produced introduction to biodiversity science. By combining metaphor, illustration, classical theory, and contemporary concerns, López has produced a work that informs, inspires, and challenges. For those of us trained in evolutionary biology, it is a welcome reminder of why biodiversity matters: not only as an object of study, but as the living game in which we, too, are players.