

Review: Ranching, Endangered Species, and Urbanization in the Southwest: Species of Capital

By Nathan Freeman Sayre

Reviewed by [William Ted Johnson](#)

Scottsdale Public Library, Palomino Branch, Scottsdale, Arizona, USA

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Nathan Freeman Sayre. *Ranching, Endangered Species, and Urbanization in the Southwest: Species of Capital*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002. 320 pp. ISBN 0-8165-2158-1 (cloth) US\$48.00

Nathan Sayre wrestles with some very tough questions in this book. Most of the issues discussed involve our perception of natural things like scenic vistas and clean water as public property, but property nonetheless, managed by agencies with monopolistic powers. He frames his discussions in the broad social framework of Pierre Bourdieu who focused on the relationships between objective order (society and natural systems) and the subjective principles of organizing and managing such systems. In Bourdieu's theory, capital may assume three forms. It may be symbolic, economic, or bureaucratic (a political function of the State). The author's principal task here is to examine the processes that have produced these forms of capital over time and the subsequent interrelationships that continue to modify them.

Sayre writes in a style that is clear, bold, and insightful. He raises many good points such as the fact that single-minded wildlife management misses the mark. For example, managing the Buenos Aires Wildlife Refuge to create suitable habitat for the endangered Masked Bobwhite only resulted in reducing Arizona's most famous bird from a symbol of survival to a mere commodity, since all efforts to establish a sustainable population failed. Attempts to manage the Refuge to favor this single species involved contradictions and conflicts such as the use of non-native grasses, which created their own set of environmental issues. Sayre refers to these conflicts as "legal fiction," illustrated by the use of terms like "natural" by resource management agencies. For instance, attempts to establish a population of Masked Bobwhite on the Buenos Aires as a natural wildlife population is fictitious since they came from domestic stock. This was a waste of tax dollars at best and misleading at worst.

Well documented and thoroughly researched, the author's work considers the broadest possible scope of environmental history in the Southwest, analyzing the historical, social, political, and ecological contexts of ranching, urbanization, and endangered species conservation. This includes making the clear distinction between real ranching and the image of ranching

supplied by Hollywood. Sayre is not entirely objective in his analysis, however. He credits the efforts of some ranchers to restore the range as significant but fails to cite excessive stocking rates as being a major source of the problem in this century. He fails to acknowledge public subsidies of ranching through a leasing system financially favoring the rancher. He also speaks of ranching as an important source of food but does not examine who benefits the most from this food source, those in poverty or the wealthy. In spite of these shortcomings, I highly recommend this book for academic, special, and public libraries, especially those located in the West. Resource professionals too will benefit from Sayre's perspective as one who has worked on the Buenos Aires himself.

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William Ted Johnson <TJohnson@ci.scottsdale.az.us>, Senior Coordinator, Scottsdale Public Library - Palomino Branch, 12575 E. Via Linda Suite 102, Scottsdale, AZ 85259-4310 USA. TEL: 1-480-312-6110. FAX: 1-480-312-6120.