

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and
Social Sciences

Great Plains Studies, Center for

Fall 2011

Review of *RARE: Portraits of America's Endangered Species*. By Joel Sartore.

Jim Mason

Great Plains Nature Center, Wichita, Kansas, jim@gpnc.org

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsresearch>



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), [Biodiversity Commons](#), [Ornithology Commons](#), [Other Animal Sciences Commons](#), [Population Biology Commons](#), and the [Terrestrial and Aquatic Ecology Commons](#)

Mason, Jim, "Review of *RARE: Portraits of America's Endangered Species*. By Joel Sartore." (2011). *Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences*. 1207.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsresearch/1207>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

BOOK REVIEWS

RARE: Portraits of America's Endangered Species. By Joel Sartore. Washington, DC: National Geographic Focal Point, 2010. 160 pp. Color photographs. \$24.00 cloth.

As someone who tries to educate the public about wildlife, I always hope my efforts will impress upon people how important the nonhuman world is and encourage them to conduct their lives with more respect and care for the environment. One thing that became clear to me early on in my career was that speaking or writing about a plant or animal never has the impact of actually experiencing one. Observing a painted turtle basking on a log, smelling the fragrance of rose verbena, or hearing the song of a dickcissel will always trump mere words.

Short of being in the presence of a creature, a really good photograph of one can also make a lasting impression. That is something *RARE* does compellingly, with exquisite portrait photos of 68 North American species that are dwindling dangerously in numbers or have recently recovered from the brink of extinction. Included are such Great Plains natives as the lesser prairie chicken, the interior least tern, and the black-footed ferret. All creatures were photographed with either a pure white or black background, but unconventional poses surprise the reader with each turn of the page, while creative framing and layout engage the eye. It's as if we were having a friendly visit with these plants and animals in their living rooms, not watching them pose stiffly for mug shots. A mouse washes its face, a toad leaps off the page, an eagle looks the other way, a salamander raises its forefoot as if to give us a "high five," a butterfly emerges from its chrysalis.

Each portrait has only a brief paragraph of text accompanying it, but introductory essays by Joel Sartore and noted author Verlyn Klinkenborg frame the narrative well and emphasize the importance of what Aldo Leopold famously established as the first rule of intelligent tinkering: "save all the pieces."

I have a book on extinct species, illustrated with a painting of each one. While the paintings are beautiful, how much better it would be to see photos of these creatures and know they are still living somewhere. I hope every species depicted so enchantingly in *RARE*, as well as those not chosen for the book, will still be here to enchant our descendants. At a time when the Endangered Species Act is under fire from those who are apparently incapable of appreciating anything that cannot be bought or sold, it's good we have books like *RARE* to demonstrate what we may lose unless we exercise more care in our stewardship of the Earth. **Jim Mason**, *Great Plains Nature Center, Wichita, Kansas.*