



REVIEW

Card Game Review: *Xeko Mission - Costa Rica, Madagascar*

Written by [Kathy Scovill](#)

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Tweens and their green-conscious parents will find the summons to "help restore balance to the Earth's ecosystems" mission enough to draw them in. What will *keep* them engaged in the world of *Xeko* is the detailed artwork, above average game play and the penchant for 8-12 year olds to collect things.

Like most trading card games (think *Pokemon* or *Yu-Gi-Oh*), your chances of winning increase as you acquire better cards. Translation: tweens will be leveraging their purchasing power to get parents to buy more cards.

Incidentally, this seems to be the only drawback to what turns out to be an engaging, sometimes challenging card game, with a subtle (but ineffectual) attempt to bring our children to eco-awareness.

Game play is fairly simple, with a number of rules that iron themselves out after a few practice rounds. In this two player game, each player starts with a deck of 40 or less cards, with no more than three duplicates of any one card. This results in varying degrees of game play, depending on which friend (and their cards) a child is playing with and how each player chooses their cards. Even I got a thrill picking and discarding cards to create my ideal deck and optimizing my chances of winning.

There are three card types including Species, Xeko and Boost cards. Each card is handsomely illustrated by artists like [Travis and Jordan Kotzebue](#) and [Michel Gagné](#). Species cards contain members of the animal, plant or insect families and are played to earn eco-points. A Species "invades" another Species territory as it is placed to face the opponent's card.

A "turf war" ensues and Boost cards are played to increase the defending Species Energy. Some Species have special powers such as Morph or Predator that serve to enhance the way that Species defends or invades during a "turf war."

As players build their eco-system, ripe with the struggle over limited resources, *Xeko* cards can be played to alter the environment and often reward the card holder with positive eco-point results. And it is with the *Xeko* cards that game developers may have missed a true teachable moment. Other than Forest Fire, the *Xeko* cards included in the starter set have little bearing on actual ecosystems and translate poorly to environmental enlightenment for the tween set.

Real world contingency can upset the balance of Earth's ecosystems and alter the environment irretrievably. Or act as a buffer, shoring them up to surge ahead stronger and more viable than before. *Xeko* cards with some eco-punch should have included Erosion, Atmospheric Warming, Bio-diversity, Disease, Species Extinction, Resilience, Tsunami, Conservation and Human Interference.

We'll give [Matter Group](#), the maker of *Xeko* eco-points for at least planting the seed.

While game play is not exactly educational, as there are no real facts about the animal species involved, the critical thinking skills needed to out strategize your opponent and earn the most eco-points will be more than enough to drag children away from zombie-like game play on any number of popular video game consoles. Elementary math skills are also exercised as each player adds/subtracts boost and eco-points throughout.

Xeko Mission: Costa Rica comes packaged in a handy cigar box that makes a great place to store cards. It also includes a clever and effective "secret" manila envelope that held the contents of the game.

The first hotspot, *Xeko Mission: Madagascar* was not packaged in this way, and while it is a minute detail, it certainly added to the allure and mystery of joining the next generation of *Xeko* Masters. If I were a tween, I'd think it was cool.

In addition to the eco-centric focus of the game, Matter Group has branched out to raise awareness in several other notable ways:

- Donating 4% of game net sales to [Conservation International](#).
- Offering a program that motivates kids to recycle booster pack wrappers back to the company.
- *Xeko* cards are printed on 100% recycled paper.

Comments

#1 — December 8, 2006 @ 21:47PM — Mark Gross [\[URL\]](#)

Thorough and insightful review, Kathy! But keep in mind that you (seemingly) only looked at 25 of the 116-card Mission: Madagascar collection and only 24 of the 150-card Mission: Costa Rica collection--those are the cards contained in each *Xeko* Starter Set. By collecting all the cards via Booster Packs (\$3.99 each), players will come across cards with powerful eco-messages such as Smuggler Captured, Deforestation, Noxious Waters, Poacher, Gold Mine (refers to cyanide use in mining), and Turtle Soup (refers to the threat turtles face from those who would eat them).

That said, while the game is meant to raise awareness about endangered species and introduce kids to the concepts of ecology and biodiversity, it was intentionally designed to not be preachy -- *Xeko* would turn its audience off were it to throw too many overt (as opposed to subtle) messages at players, especially novices.

Xeko tries to present information in a thoughtful way and allows the player to draw his or her own conclusions. For those inspired to seek more knowledge, *Xeko* provides expanded information about each animal character in the game in the [Xekopedia](#), the online storehouse of all *Xeko* data. The [xekogame.com](#) site also encourages folks to get involved in conservation efforts; it's important to look at the entire *Xeko* entertainment property as a whole, as it adds up to an engaging and enriching eco-adventure, one that's also a ton of fun!

Thank you for taking the time to post such a positive and thoughtful review. Though you award *Xeko* only three out of five stars, your words seem to convey at least a four-star rating, and for that, we here at *Xeko* HQ in Seattle are very grateful!

--Mark

#2 — December 8, 2006 @ 22:52PM — Kathy Scovill [\[URL\]](#)

Thank you for taking the time to post your comments, Mark. I enjoyed the plug for *Xeko* and agree that the starter set did not have a diverse selection of cards. The booster packs I used included several new cards but duplicated many in the starter set, which effectively makes my point that in order to enhance game play, multiple booster packs (at \$3.99 a pop) need to be purchased, with no guarantee of the cards you'll receive in any given pack. I concur that my review does not specify the cards used were those included in the starter set. Changing paragraph 7, last sentence to read "Other than Forest Fire, the *Xeko* cards included in the starter set have little bearing on actual ecosystems and translate poorly to environmental enlightenment for the tween set." might clarify things a bit. While there are several aspects of the game (game play strategy and artwork) that are above average, as a whole I felt *Xeko* warranted three out of five stars.

#4 — May 13, 2007 @ 22:21PM — Steve Turner [\[URL\]](#)

I've just recently begun checking into this game since I bought some cards for my daughter and two of her friends. I agree with just about everything you had to say with one exception. We were able to find exactly the cards we wanted to add by browsing them all online and purchasing just the ones that fit their strategies. If you google for "xeko singles" you'll find some.

-Turner

#5 — January 13, 2008 @ 18:33PM — Bill Parker [\[URL\]](#)

This was one of the most thorough reviews I've seen. Any chance you'll be doing one for Mission Indonesia soon?