

☞ Those who classify things, those men of science whose science is only that of classification, generally do not know the number of classifiable things is infinite, and that therefore they cannot be classified. But what shocks me is that they do not know of the existence of unknown classifiable things, things of the soul and of consciousness that fall between the cracks of knowledge.

[Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*]

PAUL CARTER

RETURN OF THE CENTAURS
A FIELD GUIDE

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PREFACE

One of the first times I met Paul Carter in Paestum, that city of many Centaurs, he told me he was going 'to walk around the site,' unaccompanied and without guidance. Exploring the field alone was, as I understood it, part of his creative practice. What was he looking for?

Walking a Mediterranean beach during the winter months, when the rough sea sends forth its waves eating up the shoreline, you are likely to come across small pieces of plastic waste washed ashore - 'The Mediterranean is polluted by an estimated 730 tonnes of plastic waste every day'.¹ Outside the modern city, the 'wonder material' loses its aura and slips into the rubbish category; but along the littorals of the Mediterranean, noticed or unnoticed, it goes on accumulating.²

To stop pretending the plastic is not there, to stop wishing it would go away: to look at it without judgement – this is the first step towards Centaur consciousness. The second step follows from this. Being half animal, Centaurs see nature without a romantic filter; they notice every detail without repressing anything. Like nature, they see nature whole. Because of this, their vision is healing. Pollution is not outside the system, it is a symptom of an ecosystem that is sick because humans have cut themselves off from nature. To see this wholly as the Centaur does, inaugurates the second step: healing. But to perceive the Centaur as Physician, we have to learn to see ourselves, our surroundings and our relationships differently, as parts of a whole: hence the Field Guide.

What does it mean to see as the Centaurs see? It means to see the Centaurs in the landscape; perhaps to see the half-human, half non-human landscape as *Centaur*. Recognising the historical alienation of the human spirit from the totality of nature, the German philosopher, F.W.J. Schelling, advocated a change of consciousness such that '[n]ature shall be the visible spirit, and spirit, invisible nature.' In this formulation, Centaurs are images of the spirit: no-one has seen a Centaur, but they are figures of thought that disclose nature in a new light. The contemporary landscape they inhabit is our nature, the whole of it, not simply the palaces, the ruins, the pollution observed on a walk, but the blindspots (spiritual, ecological, historical) that continue to corrode our capacity to heal ourselves.

This book is part of a broader project to deepen the meaning and purpose of archaeology in our lives, to understand what museums collect (and what they neglect). Integral to this project is a new engagement with the creative imagination: how else except through the truthful fictions of the artist's vision will the invisible materialize itself? But when it does, Carter's *Guide* seems to say, the 'spirit' will come with debris and rubbish and the responsibility to sift through it differently. To excavate the present in this way is to see the plastic inherited from the past in the form of those pollutions of the human spirit in which, now, we appear to drown.

In Aristophanes' *Wasps*, the chorus describes the effect of Aristophanes' comedy on the city: he 'turned his hands to the chills and fevers which strangled your fathers by night and choked your grandfathers.' Carter's *Field Guide*, too, is 'a purifier to keep ill away from this land', approaching the urgent ethical and environmental responsibilities of the 'new museology' with cheerful invention, verbal irony and visual wit: 'Nothing does a better job of exploding pretensions and cleaning out the cobwebs of the mind than laughter': thus Aristophanes³ and Carter's serious parody of the popular field guide is irrepressibly in this tradition.

Gabriel Zuchtriegel

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¹ UN Environment Programme, *Mediterranean Action Plan*, website.

² Sinja Rist, Nanna B. Hartmann, 'Plastics and the Sea', in *Poseidonia Water City*, (eds. G. Zuchtriegel, P.

Carter, M-E Oddo), Paestum, Campania: Pandemos, 2019, 241.

³ A truthful fiction: what Aristophanes might say to us if he *could* 'peer into the twenty-first century ...to correspond

with us who live in that most confusing and rudderless of centuries (Louis Markos, 'Aristophanes: On Laughter', *The Imaginative Conservative*, April 19, 2019).

**INTRODUCTION / PRACTICAL PRELIMINARIES /
TAXONOMIC NOTES / CENTAURS: AN ARTIST'S
IMPRESSION / ARTIST'S NOTE / CENTAUR
DISTRIBUTION / FIELDMARKS: SEVEN TYPES OF
PAREIDOLIA / FIELD TIPS**

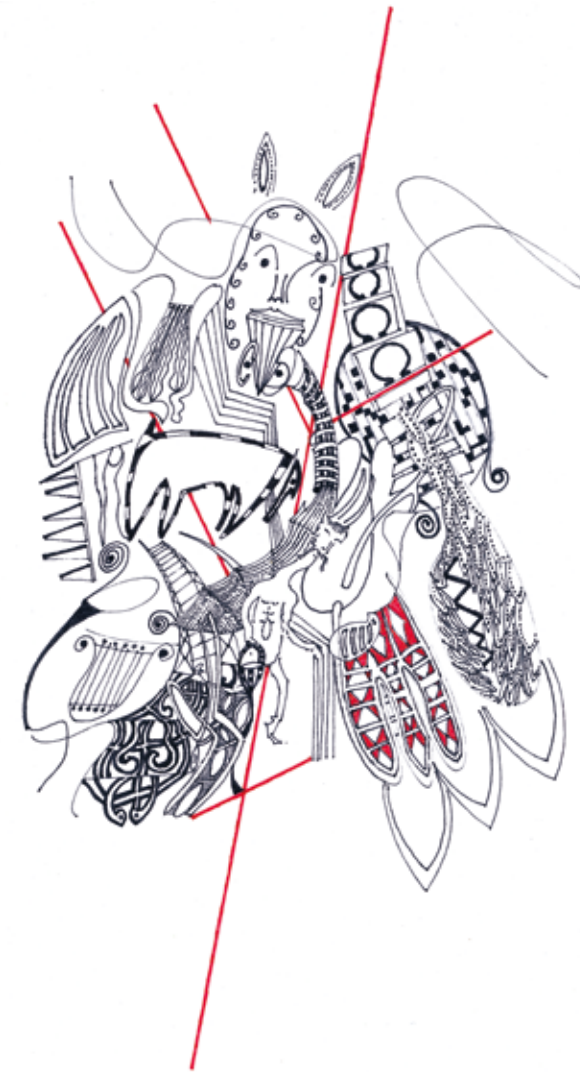
INTRODUCTION

Centaur watching is becoming increasingly popular: Centaur clubs, Centaur conservation groups and Centaur studies are growing. But practical information about them is hard to find. The object of this Field Guide is to remedy this lack. While the main purpose is to provide the watcher with a reliable guide to identification in the field, we have cited older studies wherever relevant. The primary function of the Field Guide is to increase the reward of Centaur watching, but we do not neglect the educational aspect. Considerable experience goes towards successful Centaur detection and one hope of this Guide is to assist apprentice Centaur hunters to acquire the skills of detection that make for a lifetime's happy Centaur watching.

The Field guide covers all the extant species of Centaur in the archipelago. It used to be thought that Centaur species were island specific; however, recent studies suggest inter-island migration and the likelihood that distribution maps will need to be redrawn. An additional obstacle to precision in enumerating Centaur species is the indefiniteness of the archipelago itself: an exact number for

the islands it contains has been impossible to ascertain. It is not suggested that Centaur types appear and disappear as, say, intertidal islands; yet the potentially temporary nature of the Centaur encounter presents a significant obstacle to scientific verification. There is also the challenge of authenticating older records, especially when these refer to regions (Thessaly etc.) where the Centaurs no longer flourish: it is often unclear whether Centaurs no longer found in one place have become extinct or whether they have migrated elsewhere.

Centaur taxonomy is in its infancy and the system of classification adopted in the Field Guide must be regarded as provisional. Traditionally, Centaurs have been divided into the palaeo- and neo-branches. The palaeo branch is represented by Chiron (Chronidae), while the neo (or Ixionic) branch is 'all the rest', mainly known from the Centauromachy. The hybrid nature of the Centaur suggests that evolutionary models of the relationship between different Centaurs need to be replaced by contextual accounts of emergence in which inter-specific mutation is documented.



While no DNA sequences have been recovered from Centaurs, the fact that Centaurs interbreed with species whose DNA profiles are well known offers a promising line of enquiry. It is possible that interspecies are a distinguishing feature of Centaur phylogeny.

Centaur taxonomy derives the description from the name. In most cases, the only evidence of the Centaur's existence is its name. As no record exists of named Centaurs interbreeding, we assume that the Centaur's proper name corresponds to a species name in animal taxonomy. The species accounts contain the English name, the hidden name (where known), a likelihood of encounter score and a summary of the official extinction status. The hidden name refers to the appearance of the Centaur in a different guise. The encounter score calibrates the probability of seeing a named Centaur against distribution, habitat and season. The official extinction rate is a measurement of the likelihood of the Centaur's return.

After these preliminaries, the Guide provides such measurements of the Centaur as exist: typically measurements are taken from dead specimens arranged in unlikelike poses; to avoid confusion, our dimensional estimates are derived from well-authenticated representations of living Centaurs.

The artwork is designed to be a core part of this Field Guide. In contrast with many field guides, ours shows the Centaurs in their normal habitat. Most Centaurs are difficult to see. While shown in typical postures, Centaurs typically elude recognition. The 'jizz' that experienced Centaur watchers use in making quick identifications here incorporates the creature's habitat: an important clue to a Centaur's presence can be the character of the place concealing it. A pareidolic sensibility, for example, can sometimes be as useful as a pair of binoculars.

Centaur distribution is disputed and the Guide aims only to give a realistic picture of where a Centaur may conceivably be encountered. To reflect the fact that suitable habitats are widely and sporadically dispersed throughout the archipelago, and intermediate zones and elements may be fundamentally unsuitable, minimum convex polygons are used to describe potential sighting zones. To a large extent the shape of these coincides with the outline of individual islands, which prove on this analysis to be composed of definite geometrical types.

Size in any environment is difficult to assess: the human-equine nature of the Centaur allows an intuitive grasp of scale and speed of motion; however, distant objects are often further away than they appear. The same hybrid constitution offers reasonable grounds for assuming that most Centaur topography is either skinlike or hairlike. In the latter case, bider markings have been depicted but their interpretation is uncertain.

As far as is known, the equine part of the Centaur does not age visibly: coat colour remains reasonably constant. By contrast the human half may display the different insignia of youth, adulthood and old age. Although the Chronidae are traditionally associated with the production of harmonious sound, no field recordings of their performances exist. It has been hypothesised that individuals may communicate through bird calls, while the presence of herds can be detected in wind and water sounds. No hard proof exists to support these proposals.

Equipment is important in Centaur watching, but so is the right ethical stance. Some Centaurs are hard to see without a spotlight: low illumination levels and a red filter are advised. The tripod-mounted telescope, so unwieldy in other contexts, is recommended: the ability to look at the same spot for long periods of time without undue physical discomfort is a critical component of successful Centaur detection.

Relatively few Centaur watchers are serious about recording Centaur calls. As Centaurs are mainly invisible, this is regrettable, but there are many gaps in our knowledge of Centaur communication and recommending the right sound recording gear is a matter for specialists. Ethical Centaur watching includes: a respect for tracks, minimising disturbance, avoiding breeding sites. It should also cover the vexed issue of playback: in the absence of firm data, almost any recording may be assumed to be attractive to Centaurs. Pishing is to be avoided. It can provoke aggression; an unintended side effect may be disconcertingly close encounters with other species.

Historically, the existence of Centaurs has been disputed. For this reason, it is particularly important to document your observations. Our knowledge of the distribution and habits of Centaurs has suffered from a lack of structured record-keeping. E-Centaur and other on-line forums enable Centaur watchers to share and compare findings in real time and can be critical in enabling solitary sightings.