

Falconry at Rosenburg Castle – of Counts and Hawks

De arte venandi cum avibus – On the Art of Hunting with Birds. This is the title of a timeless work written by none other than Emperor Frederick the Second himself. Some say he was an enthusiast; others might call him obsessed: In the 13th century, he produced a comprehensive work on ornithology and hunting with birds of prey, so-called falconry or hawking.

At the time of the extraordinary emperor, falconry had already been known in Europe for centuries. The art of hunting with falcons is almost as old as human civilization. It was probably first practiced in Mesopotamia and Mongolia more than 5000 years ago. The Ostrogoths eventually brought falconry to Central Europe during the Migration Period. While for thousands of years this type of hunting served primarily to obtain food, it became a symbol of wealth and aristocratic status in the High Middle Ages.

It is not known when falconry was first practiced at the Castle of Rosenburg, but certainly many a noble hunting session took place here over the centuries. The castle's history goes back to the early 12th century, when it was built under the rule of the Counts of Riedenburg from the Babonen dynasty. The dynasty became extinct in the male line only a few decades later in 1185. After a short intermezzo, the castle fell to the Dukes of Bavaria. It acquired its present form in the 16th century after taking considerable damage during the Great Peasants' War.

Today, Rosenburg Castle still presides over the Altmühl river, perched on a ridge where it provides a home to the largest falconry in the entire region, with numerous birds of prey, among them eagles and vultures, falcons and owls. No longer focused exclusively on hunting, modern falconry rather aims to create awareness for the preservation and way of life of these impressive animals.

Emperor Frederick would have loved Rosenburg Castle. The emperor was infatuated with his hawks and wanted them well cared for. The names of over 50 imperial falconers have been passed down to our day. His beloved animals were even taken along at great expense on his extensive travels.

The costs incurred by Frederick's fondness for falconry were so enormous that contemporaries rebuked or ridiculed him for it. But perhaps it is true what Frederick wrote in his book on falconry: A good falconer is also a good ruler.