



HIDDEN SECRET > Hanau • Ronneburg Falknerei



Upon hearing the call of his name, the falcon takes flight, elegantly moving towards the bit of rabbit held high in the falconer's hand. His powerful wings beat the air around him, the pressure of the displaced air causing the spectators underneath him to instinctively crouch lower. But there is no need. The bird feels much closer than he actually is. He lands gracefully on the falconer's outstretched arm to enjoy his treat, almost oblivious to the delighted audience so intently watching him.

Many in the Hanau area are familiar with the majestic Ronneburg castle. They've perhaps toured the castle museum or enjoyed a delicious dinner and the view at the restaurant. But one of the castle's hidden secrets is the historic Falknerei (falconry) and its stunning bird show.

The craft of falconry is nothing new. Humans have relied upon trained birds of prey to help them hunt for thousands of years. Sleek, powerful and agile, hawks and falcons are the ultimate hunters, able to locate and bring down their quarry quickly and without difficulty. No one is quite certain when humans first started relying on hunting birds but ancient Romans, Chinese, and Arabs are all thought to have practiced this craft. Falconry initially came to Germany by soldiers returning from the crusades in the early 1200's and was used extensively in later centuries as a means of hunting for landed gentry. Today, Europeans tend to depend more on firearms for hunting but falconry remains a popular and exclusive sport on the continent.

Walter Reinhart, a falconer with over twenty year's experience, set up the Falknerei along the outer walls

of Ronneburg castle three years ago. Since then he has delighted visitors with his educational shows about hunting birds.

The show boasts a variety of species from all over the world including hawks, falcons, buzzards, owls and even an American Bald Eagle. There's the Harris Hawk, a grasping killer from South America that enjoys hunting rabbit. And then there's the Eagle Buzzard from the Middle East whose exceptionally strong beak has been known to fell a goat. And of course, you can't forget Jacko. Jacko is an American White Eagle, or bald eagle, whose wingspan measures close to six feet. Those traveling from Hanau to Büdingen may have even seen him circling far overhead as they passed by the castle.

Reinhart brings six to ten birds out individually to show the audience. As the bird flies around the castle grounds – and often, right over the heads of the spectators – the falconer discusses their natural habitat, preferred foods, flying speeds and hunting habits. Visitors to the Falknerei are treated to an up-close-and-personal introduction to these birds of prey and are even invited to stroke the velvety feathers of Nelly, the Falknerei's resident European owl.

The experience is a must for any burgeoning ornithologists – but it is also sure to enchant animal lovers of all ages.

Cost: 3.50 euro for adults, 2.50 euro for children.

Time: 3 p.m. on weekends or weekdays by advance reservation for groups of fifteen or more.

Language: The bird show is generally narrated in German but an English narrator can be arranged with advance registration. If you happen to attend a German show, the falconers are happy to answer any questions you may have during the Q&A session in English.

How to get there (from Hanau):

- At the Hanauer Kreuz, take the A45 autobahn towards Fulda.
- Exit at Langenselbold-West (exit 41) and turn left towards Erlensee/Neuberg.
- At the roundabout, take the first exit on to Hüttengesäßer Strasse.
- You will see signs for Burg-Ronneburg on your right. Follow the small road up the hill to the castle.
- The Falknerei is inside the castle gate, down across from the restaurant. Falknerei Ronneburg • Burg Ronneburg 63549 • Ronneburg
For reservations call 06048-953858 or 0163-4094500

