

RECENT LITERATURE

A Medieval Ornithological Treatise.¹—Frederick II of Hohenstaufen (1194–1250), Holy Roman Emperor, King of Sicily and Jerusalem, was a man of many attainments. A patron of the arts and sciences, he was especially interested in mathematics, philosophy, and natural history. It is not surprising, therefore, that the sport of falconry claimed his attention and that he approached it in a true scientific spirit. When he set himself to write a book on falconry, he was not content to consider it a thing apart, but found it desirable to talk of birds in general before discussing raptorial birds in particular.

He was familiar with the works of Aristotle and other classical writers on natural history, but he refused to accept all their statements as fact, especially when his own experience and experiments led him to other conclusions. His book, consequently, is founded on his own studied observations rather than on the dicta of his predecessors. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that he reached many false conclusions while at the same time presenting many facts in dispute of Aristotle or genuinely new.

The 'De Arte Venandi cum Avibus' was the culmination of thirty years' preparation. It is known from a two-book edition in both printed and written state, and from a six-book edition that exists only in (multiple) manuscript form. Books II to VI are devoted entirely to falconry, treated in great detail. Modern falconers will find that much of it represents current practices today. There appears to be little in the art as it was exercised in Frederick's time that he has not carefully described and systematized.

Book I is of much more general interest. It is entitled 'The Structure and Habits of Birds' and is presented as a fundamental introduction to the study of falconry although it goes far beyond that topic. The author discusses morphology and anatomy of birds, the mechanical conditions of flight, methods of defense, plumage, molt and its purpose and process, distribution, nesting, and similar subjects. Migration is given considerable attention and it is interesting to see, in view of the false beliefs that persisted long after Frederick's time, how much he understood of this matter. He knew that some far northern birds moved only a limited distance southward while others from an intermediate region went beyond this. He ascribed migration to an effort to escape the cold, to obtain food in winter, or to avoid the freezing of water-refuges. He found that tropical species had no need to migrate. He knew of migration from mountains to valleys. He knew that migrants to warmer climates did not breed in winter quarters. He thought migration was not to fixed areas (although we know it sometimes is) but to whatever regions afforded food, mild temperatures, and security, but he noted that return was to the place of nativity where, perhaps, the birds had previously nested. He discredited the fabulous development of geese from barnacles and he had a definite opinion that vultures find their food by sight and not by smell. It is obvious that Frederick II was an observant ornithologist well in advance of his time. If his work had had adequate circulation in his day, perhaps it would not have taken so long for some of the facts that he announced to become established.

¹ Wood, Casey A., and Fyfe, F. Marjorie. 'The Art of Falconry being the De Arte Venandi cum Avibus of Frederick II of Hohenstaufen. Translated and edited by Casey A. Wood & F. Marjorie Fyfe.' Folio-post 4to, cx + 637, pls. 1-186 + 1 (2 col.), 1 fig. Stanford University Press, Stanford University, California. Price \$10.00.

There is so much detail in Frederick's writings that complete discussion is not possible in a short review. The translators have supplied introductory and appended discussions and explanatory footnotes throughout. Additional chapters by Creswell Shearer, Walter Schlüter, Hugh D. Knight, and Gordon Washburn add important sidelights or corollary matter. The excellent plates show various pages of the illuminated manuscripts, views of the emperor's hunting lodges and castles as they appear today or as they appeared in Frederick's time, miscellaneous memorabilia of Frederick, pictures of falcons and falconry and other pertinent subjects and a portrait of the late senior author who died early in 1942.

The truth or falsity of most of Frederick's conclusions is now well known, although some points, like the question of the vulture's discovery of its food, are still debatable. The 'De Arte Venandi cum Avibus' is important today largely for historical reasons, but it is well to realize that a work, so largely accurate, was written in the Dark Ages. Dr. Wood and Miss Fyfe performed a valuable service in making this ancient treatise so completely available to readers who would have no opportunity to examine the rare original manuscripts in which it is found and in presenting their translation and interpretation in such an attractive form.—
J. T. ZIMMER.

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