

Horrific Sex Games

The men's ring with the code name Tierkreis could have been unearthed much earlier.

The two-storey terraced house near Basel's Schützenmattpark shines in green colour. An unusual coat of paint that stands out from the other façades in the tranquil neighbourhood. The small sticker adorning the entrance door is also unusual. It shows a crocodile. Neighbours remember that the shutters in the house were often lowered in the early afternoon. But no-one thought it was a threat. The nearest police station is only a few metres away.

The officers didn't have far to go last Monday. At 5 pm, investigators from the Basel Criminal Investigation Department turned up outside the building with a search warrant. The property had previously been observed. It was not least the green colour and the crocodile sticker that persuaded the police to enter the ominous property.

The owner is 64-year-old Basel businessman R. F., known to friends as "Kroko". He is suspected of having run a secret men's ring in the house since the early 1980s under the code name Tierkreis, whose members disguise themselves with animal names. They are said to have forced hustlers from the Basel gay scene and underage boys to take part in disgusting sex parties characterised by violence and drug abuse.

According to the officers, they seized "extensive evidence" in the green house, including numerous video tapes, 98 older Super 8 films and boxes of private photos of naked men and young people. They also came across lists of names of possible members of the sex ring. According to the initial findings, only men, mainly academics, businessmen, doctors and landlords - all from Basel's better circles - belonged to the circle.

The authorities already knew the identities of half a dozen members of the circle before the house search, including two doctors: a university lecturer with the assumed name Elefant and a doctor with his own practice called Eisbär.

The fact that the officials found anything at all is spectacular. For a long time, they did not believe the statements of their only witness. Lucky, a former drug addict and hustler, said he had spent two years in the clutches of the men's ring at the beginning of the 1990s. Last April, during a four-hour interview with the Basel public prosecutor Judie Melzl, he described in detail the atrocities that had taken place in the rooms of the green house.

The result was a record of the incomprehensible. Lucky had first met R. F. at the age of 22 and had been introduced to the ring by him. He quickly became the partygoers' favourite boy. It started every Wednesday. "At 3 pm, Krokodil drank an Appenzeller, then he rolled the first joint and waited for guests," Lucky remembers. In the basement of the green house there is a wine cellar, next to it a bar and a small disco. There is a large screen on the wall and a lavish film collection nearby - forbidden videos of child sex, sadistic and sodomistic torture. There were also allegedly some with real death scenes. The crocodile had a police summons hanging on the wall in a picture frame on suspicion of abuse. "Kroko laughed when he saw the letter," says Lucky, "they were never able to prove anything."

The crocodile showed Lucky a book full of photos of young men, three shots of each: Face, buttocks and penis. Lucky had to endure the hardest, most painful male sex like a slave. For cash, to feed his drug addiction. Lucky drank urine and maltreated nipples. When regulars mutilated Lucky with cigarettes and tried to burn a K - for crocodile - on his back, he got out.

According to Lucky and his guardian, the authorities received the first indications of organised abuse of minors and addicts two years ago. There were signs - but they were not believed for a long time. Probably for fear of a major scandal. Even after Lucky's statement in April of this year, the public prosecutor's office initially remained inactive. Ten weeks passed before the house was searched.

The fact that finds were still made in the green house also leads to another conclusion: that the activities of the Animal Circle had been suspended for some time, but the members felt safe and did not consider it necessary to remove any evidence.

One person who had known about the obscure sex ring, at least to some extent, for some time was the Basel cantonal doctor Hanspeter Rohr. He had learnt about obscure secret meetings at the end of 1996 during another trial. But Rohr was convinced that the meetings were exclusively between homosexual adults. Even the fact that Rohr knew the name of one of the two doctors involved had no consequences. He trusted that the public prosecutor's office was also aware of the allegations.

Markus Melzl, spokesman for the public prosecutor's office, does not want to know anything about this: "There was no such information." In the meantime, cantonal doctor Rohr has come to the conclusion that the investigations at the time were prematurely closed.

The authorities will probably have to look far and wide in the search for evidence against the animal circle. Members of the sex club are said to have met regularly in the Spanish holiday home of the "polar bear". "Krokodil" is said to have cultivated broad international contacts with sadistically inclined men. For the time being, it remains speculation that there were links to the Belgian child molester Marc Dutroux. The investigating authorities have also learnt of a trip to Thailand. There, the animals wanted to get the ultimate thrill: to watch a man being tortured to death in front of an audience.

Translated with DeepL.