

Dissecting an Owl Pellet



What is an Owl Pellet? And What Do I Do With It?

Owls are birds of prey, which means they hunt and eat small animals and insects. What parts of the owl's body are tools for hunting and eating prey? Owl's feet have sharp talons and strong toes that can hold onto an animal and squeeze it until it can no longer breathe. Owls don't have teeth to chew the meat, but their sharp beak tears it into pieces they can swallow. They don't bother to pick out the bones or fur, so all the parts that don't get digested are regurgitated back up in a pellet.



That's right, what you've got wrapped in foil is owl vomit.

This pellet came from a real owl, and it has been sanitized so it's safe to dissect. But you should still wash your hands after dissecting it. Each owl regurgitates a pellet or two per day, so the animal bones and fur you're seeing contain what's left of about half of the animals they ate each night.

Using a plate or newspaper as a working surface, unwrap the pellet and use small tools such as toothpicks to pull it apart. Use the bone identification chart and skeleton diagram to determine how many animals they ate. (For instance, each mouse only has one skull, but two femurs.)



When you feel confident that you've properly identified bones and other parts, you can lay them out on paper and label them. Take a photo to save, then you can throw away the pellet parts in the trash or outdoors.

Now that you know what an owl pellet looks like, you may notice them in places where owls are found. Why do you think it's good to have owls around?