

A STEM in the Park Take Home Activity

STEM in the PARK

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

Pick Apart a Pellet!

What You Need

- plastic gloves
- tweezers
- toothpicks
- paper plates or disposable trays
- owl pellet (see Learn section for explanation)



Purchase sterilized owl pellets online through Carolina Biological Supply Co. at <http://www.carolina.com>

What To Do

1. Put on your gloves, unwrap your pellet and place it on a paper plate.
2. Carefully pick apart your pellet, using toothpicks and tweezers to separate bones from the fur or feathers.
3. Print out the chart from the link provided. Can you match the bones you find with those on the chart? <http://www.kidwings.com/teacher/owlpellets/bonechart.htm>

*** Don't have an owl pellet handy? Try this virtual owl pellet dissection online at Kidswings: <http://www.kidwings.com/owlpellets/flash/v4/index.htm>

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Safety Considerations...

- A. Use gloves when handling owl pellets. Handle owl pellets, even sterilized ones, as though they could be a source of bacterial or viral contamination. This is good advice for any and all lab work involving biological materials. To purchase sterilized owl pellets, visit Carolina Biological Supply online.
- B. Do not use food consumption areas for owl pellet activities. Also use disposable trays, paper, or plates as work surfaces for dissection of the pellets, and dispose of them promptly upon completion of the activity.
- C. No eating or drinking in the dissection area.

Learn...

What are Owl Pellets?

Owl pellets are masses of hair, feathers, bones, teeth, and exoskeletons of animals that they prey upon. Owl meals can be anything from large prey like squirrels, snakes, and rats, to smaller things like mice, beetles, frogs. It would take a lot of energy to digest all of the less nutritious parts of their prey, so the stomach muscles of an owl work to create a slimy, wet pellet full of these items, which they then throw up. Usually even the smallest, most fragile bones are unbroken. Scientists have even found tiny hairs from earthworms in the pellets of smaller owl species. If you are on a walk in the forest and you find a pile of owl pellets scattered on the ground, look up! You may be looking at an owl roosting spot. If you're quiet enough, you might even see the owl itself!

This activity is brought to you by Nature's Nursery, Center for Wildlife Rehabilitation & Conservation Education in Whitehouse Ohio.

