









EDUCATION

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EDU 024
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IDENTIFYING PELLETS

A pellet is formed from the remains of food that the bird cannot digest. Instead of getting rid of it as a dropping, it coughs it up out of its beak. Pellets vary according to the size of the bird and the type of food it has been eating, Look for them at roosting, nesting or feeding places.

The pellets left behind by birds such as owls, crows and hawks vary considerably in size and shape. In addition, they differ in surface appearance. Rook and crow pellets, for example, have a loose surface texture, while the material in owl pellets is bound together much more closely into a tight mass.

| Bird | Where Found | Appearance | Contents | Image |
|--|---|---|--|---|
|  Hawk (e.g. kestrel) | Near deserted buildings, under large trees, especially in open ground | 25 x 15 mm, smooth, pointed at one end | No bones, fur, feathers, claws, beaks |  |
|  Barn Owl | Near quiet buildings, under large trees | 50 x 25 mm, black and shiny when fresh, very round ends, may be spherical | Bones and fur of small animals, sometimes bones, feathers and beaks of small birds, e.g. sparrow |  |
|  Gull | Anywhere, especially under cliff breeding sites | Up to 40 x 20 mm, loose mass of material | Plant debris, some bones including fish bone, seashells |  |
|  Crow, Rook | Under nest high in tree tops | About 25 mm across, loose mass of material | Lots of plant fragments, stems, small pebbles |  |

STUDYING OWL PELLETS

Dissecting the pellet

First measure and weigh your pellet and write down the details. Now carefully break the pellet into two and place the pieces in the jug of water. Leave them for a couple of hours so the water has a chance to soak in, then gently shake the water. Add fresh water and repeat the process. Continue doing this until you are left with mostly bones. Pour off the water and empty the bones onto a kitchen towel on a saucer, Use the tweezers and needle to remove any bits that are still sticking to them. To clean the bones and make them white, leave them for a few minutes in hydrogen peroxide (you can get this from your chemist).

Identifying the bones

You will be surprised at the number of bones you will find in just one pellet. They may come from several different animals, but you may be lucky and find enough bones to make up part of a skeleton. Identifying bones is difficult, but can be done if you have a good book.

Types of bones

Below you can see some of the common types of bones you will find. Most of them will be from shrews, mice, voles and small birds. You may also find some beetle wing cases in the pellets.

Store the different types of bones in matchboxes. Write on a label where and when they were found and which pellets they came from.

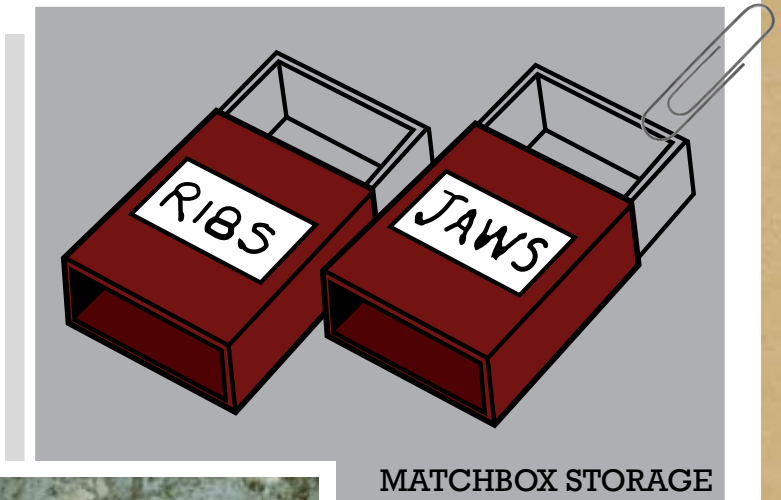
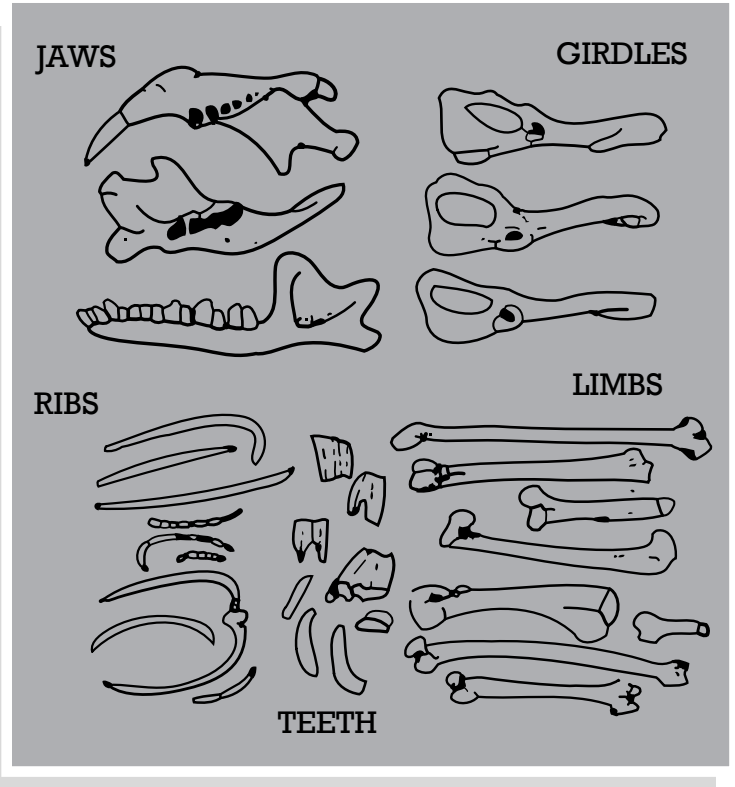
Good books:

Collins Guide to Animal Tracks & Signs by P.Bong

Our aim is to protect, conserve and promote the natural and built environment for the benefit of present and future generations.

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BARN OWL



WOOD MOUSE