

## Owl Pellets, Food Webs, and Pyramids

### Purpose:

Dissect owl pellets to collect and count the contents in order to create food webs and pyramids of numbers and biomass.

### Background Information:

The barred owl inhabits woodlands and swamps in the Eastern part of the United States. This owl is approximately 43-50 cm (17-20 in) long with a wingspan of 99-110 cm (39-43 in) and has a mass of 0.50-1.05 kg. Owls are nocturnal raptors that feed on small mammals, birds and reptiles. Owls swallow their food whole or if too big, may tear it into chunks. Owls are not able to digest hair, bones or feathers. The owl digestive system has a specialized section that presses the undigested portions together forming a pellet. Since the owls cannot pass the pellet through their digestive system, they must spit out the pellet.

The bones that are found in the pellet can be identified using pictorial 'keys'. This information can be used to determine a food web and the approximate number and biomass of prey ingested in one year. This data will be used to create number and biomass pyramids.



### Materials

Blank Paper	Owl pellets	Forceps	Probes	Petri dish
Masking tape	Rubber gloves	Rulers	Identification Charts	

### Procedure

1. You will work with your group on this lab activity. Obtain one set of materials for you and your group.
2. Work on a sheet of white paper to decrease clean-up time and help you see the bones.
3. Remember to use gloves, but also wash hands at the end of the procedure. These pellets have been sterilized, but remember to use proper laboratory procedures.
4. Use dissecting tools and fingers to gently pry apart the pellet. NOTE: The bones you are looking for are small and easily broken.
5. Carefully clean and set aside any bones found in a petri dish.
6. Repeat until you have completely dismantled the pellet.
7. Separate the skull bones using the following criteria
  - a. Shape and size of the skull
  - b. Shape of eye sockets
  - c. Length of the snout compared to the rest of the skull

Use the **dichotomous key** below this step and Figure OPL-2 below the key to identify the prey species by skull.

(NOTE: You may not always need to locate the mandible (lower jaw) of the skulls to identify the prey specimen. If you have more than one skull, identify each.)

Does the animal have....	Then...
1. a) 3 or fewer teeth on each side of its upper jaw? b) 4 or more teeth on each side of its upper jaw?	go to 2. go to 3.
2. a) 2 biting teeth on its upper jaw? b) 4 biting teeth on its upper jaw?	go to 4. it's a <u>rabbit</u> .
3. a) a skull length of 23 mm or less and brown teeth? b) a skull length of more than 23mm and approx. 44 teeth	it's a <u>shrew</u> . it's a <u>mole</u> .

# Owl Pellets Food Webs And Pyramids Answers

**J Spring**



## **Owl Pellets Food Webs And Pyramids Answers:**

**Harcourt Science: Earth science [grade] 6, units C and D, teacher's ed** ,2000      What's in a Pellet? Owl Digestive System and Dissecting Owl Pellets | Grade 6-8 Life Science Baby Professor,2024-04-15 Filled with stunning images and age appropriate content students will learn about owl biology with What s in a Pellet Perfect for grades 6 8 this book explores the owl s digestive process and the intriguing practice of pellet dissection Discover owls vital role in ecosystems their unique digestive system and how dissecting owl pellets provides insights into food chains This book is a must have resource for STEM educators homeschooling parents and young scientists eager to uncover the secrets of nature s nocturnal hunters

Food Webs & Pyramids of Numbers ,2006      **ANALYSIS OF OWL PELLETS.** DEREK W. YALDEN,2020      *Stability of Complex Food Webs* Anje-Margriet Neutel,2001

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