

# OWL PELLETS – GRADE 5

## OBJECTIVES

1. Explore owl pellets.
2. Determine the eating habits of a great horned owl.



## VOCABULARY:

**Owl Pellet** - spherical glob of indigestible material, usually fur and bones, regurgitated by an owl about 12 hours after eating.

**Prey** - animal taken by a predator as food.

**Predator** – an animal that hunts and other living animals for food.

## PROCEDURE:

### Activity 1: What is an owl pellet?

**Materials:** *Owl Pellets* slideshow; owl pellets, tweezers, rodent skeleton key

1. Go through the *Owl Pellet* slideshow to help describe how owls are different from other birds.
2. Have students pair up. Each pair should get an owl pellet, two pairs of tweezers, and a rodent skeleton key. Students can use the tweezers or their hands to closely examine the contents of the pellet. Caution: bones are little and can break easily.
3. Using the rodent skeleton key and the vole skeleton featured on the inside pages of their workbook, have students try to predict what bone they have found and record it on page 4 of their workbooks. They should write the name of the bone then describe it in the space provided.

Owls swallow their prey nearly whole, however, the fur and bones of their prey cannot be digested. The food goes into the proventriculus which is found just before the gizzard, where food is ground up. Owls and other birds of prey do not have a crop, a muscular expandable pouch near the throat used to store food for later digestion. As food starts to digest in the gizzard, the muscles separate the fur from the bones. The fur and bones are then pushed forward to the proventriculus. About 12 hours after eating their prey owls spit out a "pellet," an ellipsoidal to spherical glob. Owl pellets are clean of all flesh and odorless.

The pellets in the kits are mainly from great horned owls. This type of owl preys on rabbits, smaller rodents, and birds. Great horned owls are 18-25 inches tall and can be identified by their wide set ear tufts and the mottled gray-brown in the upper body and a fine dark horizontal barring below. The great horned owl has a deep resonant hoot; “*hoo, hoo-hoo, hoo.*” The materials in this kit are from the San Francisco Bay Area, but great horned owls range in all of North America. They build their nests in mature tree tops, crevices, or cliffs and lay two or three white eggs.

### **Activity 2: Bone study card**

**Materials:** blank index card; rodent bone; glue

1. Have student select one bone from the bones they separated from their owl pellets.
2. Glue the bone onto an index card and label using the vole skeleton key.

### **Activity 3: *Owl Pellet Party* storybook**

1. Read the storybook *Owl Pellet Party* to review.

### **Materials Provided**

- 15 Owl Pellets
- 32 pairs tweezers
- 15 Rodent anatomy identification keys