

OWL PELLET DISSECTION

AGES

Children 8+ years

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Find bones in owl puke! But first read some owl books and give some fun owl facts. Ask children to guess how many bones they think they will find, and give a prize to whoever is the closest to their guess. Teen volunteers or caregivers could assist in the dissection, working slowly to remove and identify bones as they go. Suggested runtime: 90–120 minutes



Image source: Shutterstock

MATERIALS AND PREPARATION

You will need:

- Owl pellets from Amazon or Carolina Biological (one per family)
- Tweezers
- White printer paper or paper plates
- Hand sanitizer and vinyl gloves
- USB microscope (optional)

UNIQUE SPACE AND PERSONNEL NEEDS

Optionally, invite guest speakers from a raptor center, Audubon Society chapter, or local zoo.

RESOURCES

Web

Tips for owl pellet dissection: <https://bit.ly/2SVIvmM>

Source for owl pellets: <https://bit.ly/2WORw2e>

Facts about owl pellets from the International Owl Center: <https://bit.ly/2WIT8KE>

Ted-Ed: How Animals See in the Dark by Anna Stökl: <https://bit.ly/2YWUHRf>

Night vision article on EarthSky: <https://bit.ly/2T1m6o9>

Owl Research Institute <https://www.owlresearchinstitute.org>

13 Fun Facts About Owls by The Audubon Society: <https://bit.ly/2T0nes3>

Owls from The Cornell Lab: <https://bit.ly/3cn8qvn>

TIP:

Owl pellet dissection could also be part of a program about nocturnal creatures. Invite a guest speaker from your local Audubon chapter, zoo, or park; set up a simulation of owl and bat habitats in a darkened room, or build a bat house and discuss the importance of bats in managing the insect population. Recommended reference book: *Bats: An Illustrated Guide to All Species* (2018) by Marianne Taylor and Merlin Tuttle.

ADAPTATION:

For younger children, show pictures of various foods and ask children to guess what owls might choose. They can make a collage on a paper plate of things an owl might eat. You could talk about owl pellets, but skip the dissection for a younger crowd.

ADAPTATION:

For tweens or teens, provide bone charts for small animals and ask them to reconstruct their findings. If you do this, make sure to purchase pellets that have skeletons that can be reconstructed.

Owl Books

Picture Books

Glow: Animals with Their Own Night-Lights (2015) by W.H. Beck (NF)

Good Night Owl by Greg Pizzoli (2016) (F)

Greta the Great Horned Owl (2019) by Christie Gove-Berg (NF)

Little Owl's Night (2013) by Divya Srinivasan (F)

Owl Babies by Martin Waddell (2002) (F)

Owl Bat, Bat Owl (2017) by Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick (F)

Owl Sees Owl by Laura Godwin (2016) (F)

Owls (2006) by Gail Gibbons (NF)

Prickly Hedgehogs (2018) by Jane McGuinness (NF)

Whoo Goes There? (2009) by Jennifer Ericsson and Bert Kitchen (NF)

Early Readers

Eva's Treetop Festival (2015) by Rebecca Elliott (or any Owl Diaries book) (F)

Hoot Owl, Master of Disguise (2015) by Sean Taylor (F)

Owls (2014) by Laura Mash (NF)

Book of Bones: 10 Record-Breaking Animals (2017) by Gabrielle Balkan and Sam Brewster (NF)

Middle Grade

Owl Puke, the Book (2013) by Jane Hammerslough (NF)

Owling: Enter the World of Mysterious Birds of the Night (2019) by Mark Wilson (NF)

Owl's Outstanding Donuts (2019) by Robin Yardi (F)

Owls: Strange and Wonderful (2016) by Laurence Pringle (NF)

Snowy Owl Invasion! Tracking an Unusual Migration (2018) by Sandra Markle (NF)

Bats: Learning to Fly (Science Comics) (2017) by Falyynn Kock (NF)