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Classical Conversations, Week 11

Journal Entry for _____

Owl Pellet Bone Chart				
	Rodent	Shrew	Mole	Bird
Skull				
Jaw				
Scapula				
Forelimb				
Hindlimb				
Pelvic Bone				
Rib				
Vertebrae	      			

Look carefully in the forest, and you might find an owl pellet.

Owl pellets are masses of bone, teeth, hair, feathers and exoskeletons of various animals preyed upon by raptors, or birds of prey. Pellets are produced and regurgitated not only by owls, but by hawks, eagles and other raptors that swallow their prey whole or in small pieces. Owls feed early in the evening and regurgitate a single pellet approximately 20 hours after eating. Unlike snakes, the protein enzymes and strong acids which occur in the digestive tract of raptors do not digest the entire meal. The relatively weak stomach muscles of the bird form the undigested fur, bones, feather etc. into wet slimy pellets. In this process even the most fragile bones are usually preserved unbroken.

The owl pellets that you will be examining in this lab have been collected and fumigated from common barn owls. Owl pellets themselves are ecosystems, providing food and shelter for communities which may include clothes moths, carpet beetles and fungi. Clothes moth larvae are frequently abundant in pellets, feeding on fur and feathers. The black spheres about the size of periods (.) that are found in the pellets are the droppings of the caterpillars. The larvae metamorphose near the surface of a pellet in cocoons made of fur.

Procedure:

- ☐ Measure the width of your owl pellet.
- ☐ Measure the length of your owl pellet.
- ☐ Examine the exterior of the owl pellet.
- ☐ Do you see signs of fur or feathers.