



Laboratory Activity

Owl Pellets

The barn owl usually feeds on small mammals such as rodents, moles, and shrews. These mammals are swallowed whole. Some parts of the mammals dissolve in the owl's stomach. The indigestible parts, such as bones, hair, and feathers, are regurgitated in an owl pellet. You can find out what an owl eats by examining the owl pellet in this laboratory.

Strategy

You will dissect an owl pellet and identify animal skulls found in the owl pellet. You will construct a chart of the numbers and kinds of prey eaten by owls.

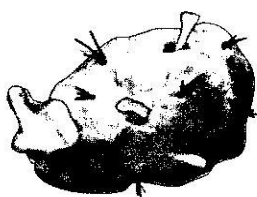
Materials



plastic gloves
forceps
owl pellet
white sheet of paper
dissecting needle
field guide to small mammals

Procedure

1. Use the forceps to place the owl pellet on the white paper.
2. Break the owl pellet apart. Carefully separate the bones of the animals from the feather and fur.
3. Use the forceps and dissecting needle to clean skull bones. **CAUTION:** Use sharp objects with care.
4. Identify the skulls of the animals that the owl has eaten. You will need to use a field guide to small mammals. Record the number of skulls of different animals in Table 1.
5. Make a class record of the kinds and numbers of animals found in the owl pellets.



Owl pellet



Mouse skeleton

Name _____

Date _____

Class _____

Laboratory Activity 2 (continued)**Data and Observations****Table 1**

Animal	Number—individual	Number—class
Shrew		
Mole sparrow		
Vole		
Deer mouse		
Rat		
Other		
Total		

Questions and Conclusions

1. What was the outside covering of the owl pellet?

2. An owl regurgitates one pellet a day. How many animals did your owl eat in one day?

3. What animals did you find in the owl pellet?

4. What is the owl's role in the environment?

5. Is the owl a herbivore or a carnivore?

6. Poisons found in the environment often accumulate in the bodies of small mammals. How would this affect the owl that preys on these animals?

Strategy Check

_____ Did you dissect an owl pellet and identify animal skulls?

_____ Did you construct a chart of the kind and numbers of prey eaten by owls?

