

Smaller bones are more difficult to identify because they look very similar to each other. This is a sign of evolution, as the owls' prey have all evolved to live similar lifestyles so have similarly skeletons as a result.

There are some clues to look out for that will help you identify where in the body the bones have come from, which will help you to count how many prey are in your pellet. There are also some unusual bones on this guide that will help you to identify specific species.

MATRIX OF THE PELLET

The main part of the pellet is called the matrix.

It can be made of different materials that can tell us what the owl has eaten.

Fur



Likely to be from a mammal.

Feathers

This shows that a bird is present, although their bones might be crushed.



Sand grains/ soil

This shows that the owl has been eating invertebrates such as worms, beetles or caterpillars.



Sometimes you might find a beak in your owl pellet. This shows that you have a small bird.

Birds skulls and bones are very fragile and light so are unlikely to have survived whole.

Why might they be so fragile?

LONG BONES

These are the shape most people picture when they think of bones. They are long from end to end, rather than the bones in your hand or spine, which are shorter and more round.



Human

Rabbit

tibio-

fibula

arm

Rabbit

humerus

The tibia and fibula are the two bones in the lower part of your leg. In some animals such as rabbits or rats, these fuse together to make one bone (tibio-fibula) with a loop in it.

Larger animals such as rabbits might be eaten without their head by owls as it is too big to swallow.



Mole humerus



The femur is the top bone in your leg.

Rabbit femur

A mole's humerus (see left) looks very different as it spends a lot of time digging.

What advantage might this shorter, more squat shape have to a digging lifestyle?

