

All About Food Chains

Investigation Data Sheet



What Is the Role of the Owl in the Food Chain?

Owl pellets are the waste an owl leaves when it is done digesting its food. Interestingly, things like animal teeth and bones don't get digested. As a result, much can be learned about what the owl ate and the role of the owl in the food chain by looking at owl pellets.

Objective

Investigate the role of the owl in the food chain by looking at owl pellets.

Materials

- owl pellets (They can be ordered from a biological supply store.)
- a cup
- a probe
- water
- tweezers or toothpicks
- a sponge
- a reference manual for small animal bones
- an adult helper

Safety Notice: All applicable laboratory safety rules must be followed. Students should not perform any experimental activity without the teacher's supervision and express permission. Students must follow safety guidelines and wear appropriate protective gear.

Procedure

1. If the pellets are dry, soak them in a cup of water for several minutes in order to soften the fur and feathers that the pellets may contain.
2. Use the tweezers and probe to carefully pick apart the pellets. Separate the bones, teeth and other hard material from the soft fur and feathers.
3. Now clean the teeth and bones with a moistened sponge. Can you guess what kind of animals the bones are from? Use your reference manual to try to identify the items that you recover. They should look like small animal parts — such as animal skulls.
4. When you are through with your owl pellets and animal bones, be sure to wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water.

Conclusions

- What animal parts were you able to identify in the owl pellets?

- What role does the owl play in the food chain?

- Use the space below to sketch what a food chain containing an owl might look like.