

Owl Pellet Dissection and Bone Identification Workshop 16/04/2024

Guilfield Old School, with Ric Morris

This proved a very popular workshop, with over twenty members signing up (19 attended). We were not disappointed!

Ric set up a display of various skeletons and skulls, and began with an entertaining talk and slides. A memorable line was that owl pellets are 'spew, not poo'. He told us what remains we might find and how to roughly ID them into voles, mice, shrews and others. His pictures were very helpful in showing us what to expect, and to refer back to later.

We had a good supply of Montgomeryshire barn owl pellets, so we got going. Several people had impressive dissecting kits, but most of us brought ordinary tweezers, cocktail sticks and other home implements. We began by soaking a pellet in water, then gently prising apart the furry bundles. (Ric advises anyone with asthma or fur-related allergies to wear a mask). Unbelievably tiny bones appeared, including the all-important jaw bones which identification requires.



Ric moved around our little tables, giving us plenty of encouragement, advice and further information. Most people managed to take at least two pellets apart, and IDs came thick and fast. A list of species, and approximate numbers of each, was made for the county record.

This was the first workshop the society has held for a few years, and attendees agreed that it was interesting and enjoyable to learn with 'hands on'. We enjoyed Ric's style so much that he was booked for a winter talk. He also provided us with a copy of his training information as a follow up, so we are well equipped to continue in our studies, if we can just track down a handy owl roost...

Many thanks to Sue Southam for acquiring the Montgomeryshire owl pellets from Paul Roughey.

Barn owl pellets collected throughout 2023 at Penrhos, Montgomeryshire, SJ235164.
About 50 pellets were dissected by 19 attendees.

Field vole *Microtus agrestis* 35
Bank vole *Myodes glareolus* 2
Wood mouse *Apodemus spp.* 9
Yellow Necked Mouse *A. flavicollis* 2
Common shrew *Sorex araneus* 7
Pygmy shrew *Sorex minutus* 3
Water shrew *Neomys fodiens* 1

Organisation and Report by Philippa Young
(Photo of room view by Sue Southam, close ups by Philippa)