**Owl Pellets – teaching ideas**

Links to literacy – The Owl Who Was Afraid of the Dark

Owl Babies

**CfE Links - Planet Earth: Biodiversity and Interdependence (SCN 0-02a-2-02a)**

How are owl pellets formed? (background for teachers)

Owls cannot chew their food so bones and fur tend to be swallowed

Owls have no Crop (most other birds have this loose sac in the throat that serves as storage for food for later consumption) Since owls lack this structure food is passed directly into their digestive system

The stomach of the owl has two parts:

* The first part is the glandular stomach or **proventriculus**, which produces enzymes, acids, and mucus that begin the process of digestion.
* The second part is the muscular stomach, called the **ventriculus**, or **gizzard**. There are no digestive glands in the gizzard, and in birds of prey, it serves as a filter, holding back insoluble items such as bones, fur, teeth and feathers. Soft parts of the food are ground by muscular contractions, and allowed to pass through to the rest of the digestive system, which includes the small and large intestine
* Several hours after eating, the indigestible parts (fur, bones, teeth & feathers that are still in the ventriculus or gizzard) are compressed into a **pellet**. This pellet travels up from the gizzard back to the proventriculus. It will remain there for up to 10 hours before being regurgitated. Because the stored pellet partially blocks the owl's digestive system, new prey cannot be swallowed until the pellet is ejected. Regurgitation often signifies that an owl is ready to eat again. When the owl eats more than one prey item within several hours, the various remains are consolidated into one pellet

**Investigating**

Pupils can work in pairs to dissect an owl pellet (wear gloves if wished), using tweezers. The Barn Owl Trust provides identification keys for pupils to investigate whether they have skulls, limbs etc in their pellet and what animal they may be from. Using the templates provided, pupils can stick the cards from the animals they have found on to the board, generating a whole class pictogram.