

Analysis of Pellet

Date found : 05 or 06/2020

Place found: Holt Island Nature Reserve, on the table outside the Holt, presumed dropped from tree.

Found by: Paul Claydon

Description of pellet:

Believed incomplete on discovery, the pellet (Image 1) weighed exactly 1gm and measured approximately 42x51 mm with a flocculate grey appearance, which broke easily into smaller pieces.

Analysis and dissection of pellet:

Following steam sterilisation the pellet disintegrated and was soaked in water to allow the residual bones of the prey item to be retrieved and catalogued.

Only a few small bones were recovered. There was a considerable amount of grey fluffy dust containing small sections of feather along with some larger pieces of grey feather approximately 50mm in length and in a fragile condition. A fine needle was passed through one of the bones. There were several sections of quill from feathers and a willow seed full of fluff.

All the recovered parts were placed together in groups and photographed (Images 2 and 3)

The size of the larger bones was compared to charts produced by Albarella, Yalden and Albarella (Ref 1)

This suggests that the prey item may have been a Starling or Song thrush.

Conclusion:

The contents of the pellet are almost solely of avian origin, with the absence of head or legs.

Comments:

The size and appearance of the pellet is in keeping with pellets of both the Sparrowhawk and the Tawny Owl. However the fact that the prey item is a bird minus head and with so few bones present indicates Sparrowhawk. There have been several sightings of Sparrowhawks feeding in this area. Also there is no need for owls to resort to taking birds when the weather has been mild and there would be plenty of small rodents available.



Image 1 Pellet



Image 2 Contents of pellet without feather waste.



Image 3 Close up of small section of feather

Ref: The History of British Birds 2009; Albarella, Yalden & Albarella