

## Analysis of Pellet

Date found : 11/02/2019

Place found: Holt Island Nature Reserve, on stump close to beehives

Found by: Kevin Loader and Nigel Sprowell

Description of pellet:

Believed intact on discovery, the pellet was approximately 50 x 30mm with a flocculate\* grey appearance, which broke easily into smaller pieces.

Analysis and dissection of pellet:

Following steam sterilisation the pellet broke down further into small parts which were then soaked in water to allow the residual bones of the prey item to be retrieved and catalogued.

A good number of reasonably intact small bones were recovered but no skull or teeth were present. There was a considerable amount of grey fluffy dust containing small sections of feather along with two larger pieces of brown coloured feather approximately 40 mm in length and in a fragile condition. A fine needle was passed through one of the larger limb bones. A united section of small bones, some of which had claws attached was also recovered. Several small hard pieces of mineral and one small hard plant seed were also recovered.

All the recovered parts were placed together in groups and photographed (Image 1)

Conclusion:

The contents of the pellet are almost solely of avian (bird) origin and represent a good proportion of the skeleton of a very small bird, the colour and structure of the sections of feather would suggest a Wren but this cannot be confirmed as the skull is absent.

Comments:

The size and appearance of the pellet is in keeping with pellets produced by Tawny Owls but does not necessarily rule out small raptors, although these seem less likely. Small birds are known to be prey items taken infrequently by Tawny Owls.

The recognisable bones have been mounted as an assemblage which is not necessarily anatomically correct but thought to be suitable way to introduce pellets to visitors (Images 2,3 and 4) The remainder along with clumps of the dust has been labelled and retained for the short term.

\*Flocculate, often used to describe substances, means to form into an aggregate mass consisting of smaller loosely compacted masses. In this case lots of fluffy bits pressed into one lump!

Image 1



Image 2



Images 3 and 4

