

Droppings

Another way to find out which animals are around and what they are feeding on is to look for droppings. All animals produce waste at some stage of their activity, often getting rid of the indigestible parts that provide evidence of their diet.

Even birds produce solid waste, though this is regurgitated through the mouth in pellets. The owl is well known for the production of pellets, but seed-feeding birds such as goldfinches have to get rid of indigestible husks and many insect-feeding birds expel hard wing cases in pellet form.

Owl pellets



Owl pellet

Owls are an interesting group to study as most of their diet can be determined from pellet examination. Finding owl pellets is difficult as they are normally deposited at roost or nest sites. However some are ejected during hunting.

An owl has to land before it can regurgitate a pellet, so on open ground look at the bottom of fence-posts or solitary trees. In woodland, try searching a wide area at the base of trees.

Mammal droppings

Rabbits, hares and even roe deer, being herbivores and feeding on the same type of food, all have similar droppings. However, close inspection of shape and size does give away the species. Deer faeces are more oval in shape, and each dropping has a small indentation at one end.

Badgers use communal latrines as both territory markers and social bonding sites. They are called dung pits and can be found close to a sett or at the edge of the group's feeding range.

Badgers like to place their droppings into pits which they dig out prior to use, unlike foxes who usually leave droppings on tussocks or mounds. A badger's dung pit is left uncovered.



Rabbit droppings



Deer droppings



Badger droppings