



## GREENBURGH NATURE CENTER

99 DROMORE ROAD, SCARSDALE, NY 10583  
914-723-3470 FAX: 914-725-6599

[www.greenburghnaturecenter.org](http://www.greenburghnaturecenter.org)

### BIRDS OF PREY Teacher Informational Sheet



#### GENERAL

Our naturalists gear each program to the grade level of your students and will accommodate any competency level if notified in advance. Our programs stress hands-on and direct involvement learning. *ALL Groups Meet In The Visitors Parking Lot.*

#### BIRDS OF PREY (GRADES K-2ND; 60 MINUTES, GRADES 3RD-7TH; 90 MINUTES)

Soaring, diving, catching prey on the wing. Raptors capture the imagination of young and old. The live raptors in our outdoor Birds of Prey House provide a unique opportunity for students to observe the physiology and adaptations that enable birds of prey to do what they do so well. An investigation of raptors, including the dissection of an owl pellet (for grades 3+), provides insight into “specialization” and what life is like near the top of the food chain. **Materials fee of \$15 per class for grades 3+.**

#### WHAT ARE RAPTORS?

Owls, hawks, and hawklike birds including vultures, osprey, eagles, harriers, and falcons, are birds of prey. Birds of prey, especially hawks and their relatives, are also called **raptors**, a Latin word meaning “plunderer.”

Birds of prey have special characteristics and adaptations for hunting that set them apart from other birds. Raptors are characterized by strong legs, powerful feet with sharp talons, a hooked beak used to tear prey, keen eyesight, and excellent flying ability.

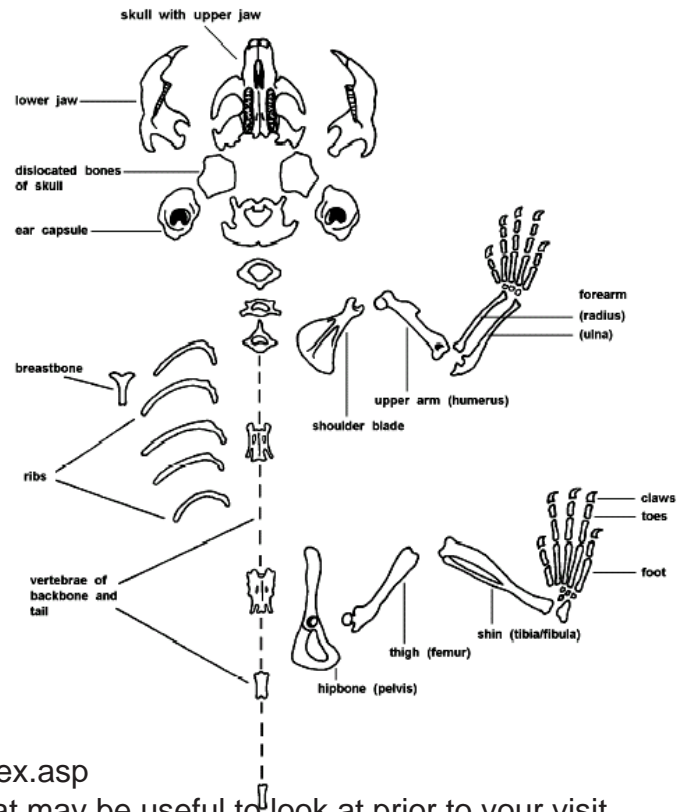




## OWL PELLETS

Owl pellets are made up of bone, teeth, hair, feathers and exoskeletons of various animals that are preyed upon by owls. Pellets are produced and regurgitated not only by owls, but also by hawks, eagles and other raptors that swallow their prey whole or in small pieces.

Compared to mammals, raptor digestive tracts have weaker enzymes and acids which do not digest the entire meal. Instead, the muscles of the bird's digestive system form the undigested fur, bones, etc. into a wet slimy pellet. Owls feed and then regurgitate a single pellet about 20 hours later.



## Owl Pellets - A Scientific Investigation

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/youth/makeanddo/do/pellet/index.asp>

This website has information about owl pellet study that may be useful to look at prior to your visit.

## Some Birds of Prey Facts

- A vulture's diet consists mostly of carrion (dead meat!), which they spot from the air by sight and smell!
- With the ability to sustain life on half-rotten meats, vultures have extreme tolerance for microbial toxins (botulism) that exceeds the capacities of many other birds.
- To see the things around them, owls must use the added bones in their neck (14 total) to rotate their head. They can rotate their heads about 270° in one direction - NOT IN A COMPLETE CIRCLE!
- Owls have soft-edged flight feathers that allow them to fly almost silently.
- Hawks have excellent hearing and eyesight. Their vision is 8x greater than that of a human!
- The bald eagle is America's national symbol and has been since 1782 and is unique to North America! The average wingspan of an eagle can vary from six to seven feet! WOW! That's a BIG bird!
- Falcons are powerful fliers and divers with long, narrow, pointed wings and long tails. Among the most aerial and acrobatic of the raptors their flight ability is legendary; scientist say these raptors can fly at speeds of over 100 miles per hour!

### SOME WEB PAGES WHICH MAY BE OF INTEREST:

**IdahoPTV.org** - Great all around raptor pages with classroom activities.  
<http://idahoptv.org/dialogue4kids/season10/birdsofprey/>

**New York State Department of Environmental Conservation**  
 Facts about Bald Eagles. <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7068.html>

**Carolina Raptor Center** - Information & games/activities for kids of all ages.  
<http://www.carolinaraptorcenter.org/index.php>

**The Peregrine Fund** - Information about peregrines and other raptors.  
[http://www.peregrinefund.org/explore\\_raptors/index.html](http://www.peregrinefund.org/explore_raptors/index.html)

