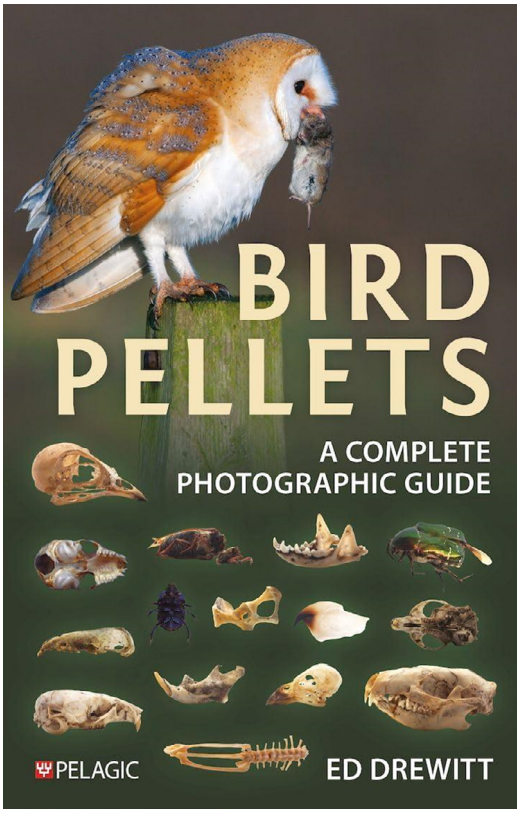
Publishers and Authors are invited to submit a copy of their books for a review in the journal.

Avocetta – vol. 49
doi: 10.30456/avo.28432
Published online: 6 October 2025

A NEW AND COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO THE IDENTIFICATION OF PREY REMAINS IN RAPTOR PELLETS



Drewitt E. 2024. Bird Pellets. A complete photographic guide. Pelagic Publ., London. 250 pp., 685 color photos of mammal and bird skulls, and prey.

Bird pellets are the undigested remains of food that form together into a ball and are regurgitated by birds. They are generally associated with nocturnal and diurnal birds of prey, but in reality there are numerous species of birds that regurgitate pellets, like corvids, waders, bee-eaters and many others. Ed Drewitt is a naturalist with a high interest in the birds' diet; his interests appeared since he was seven years old and was collecting pellets, skulls and feathers. Those who have studied raptor pellets have undoubtedly consulted Yalden's excellent guides from the 1970s, where many mammal bone remains were drawn. Drewitt's book goes much further than previous guides and illustrated articles, thanks to the author's long experience and the present availability of digital photographs that make it much quicker to assemble the images.

Dissecting bird pellets and identifying their contents may be an useful tool for understanding what birds are feeding, but it is necessary to follow a method and be rigorous in recognizing prey. The book of Drewitt explains what pellets are and how they are formed; it also gives methodological instructions on how to dissect them and analyze the contents, so as to

get a clear picture of the diet of many birds from the golden eagle to the dipper.

The analysis of pellets is incomparably an excellent method of introducing school and university students to the world of nature. When these classroom exercises are carried out, one almost always discovers the hidden interest of a few students who would like to pursue these studies on their own.

On the first pages, the author explains the difference between pellets and faeces, also with the help of numerous photos. He then explains where pellets can be found, how to store them, and how dissection and identification are carried out. The special feature of this book is the quantity of photos of pellets of numerous bird species, how to recognize and compare them. Traditional studies of pellets mostly concern birds of prey, but this guide also covers the analysis of pellets of many other birds, such as corvids, gulls, terns, herons, cormorants, kingfishers, bee-eaters, waders, dippers, shrikes and even robins and blackbirds. A good half of the book is dedicated to prey, through a meticulous presentation of the bone parts that can be found inside the pellets, how to recognize the different species of small mammals (but also larger mammals, like rabbits, weasels and hedgehogs) by the shape of their incisors and molars, and other bone parts. In addition, and this is a truly original part, there are numerous photos of reptile (snakes and lizards) and amphibian (frogs, newts and toads) bone remains. A final chapter is devoted to invertebrates and a sequence of some 40 bird skulls. The seven pages of references contain the entire bibliography cited in the text.

The book largely lives up to the expectations derived from its title; this is a beautiful and comprehensive photographic guide to bird pellets and their prey, which the author has extensively summarized. A must-have in the library of anyone studying bird diets.

Bruno Massa
ORCID 0000-0003-2127-0715
Università di Palermo (ROR 04fz79c74)
bruno.massa@people.unipa.it