

We saw what looked like feces with animal bones and feathers and wondered if birds (owls, hawks) regurgitate their food, or if it is just “scat”?

Since you asked two questions in one you get two answers: yes and maybe.

Owls are the birds most noted for “making” pellets. Owls are not shy living around people (Barn Owls (*Tyto alba*) got their common name because they often live in barns—very near people). Farmers like owls living in their barns because the owl will eat lots of rodents which would have eaten lots of the farmers' grain. Since Barn Owls are easy to find and roost in an enclosed space, their pellets can be found easily. Many companies sell Barn Owl pellets for study in science classes, by looking at the stuff in a pellet you can learn a lot about what an animal eats.

Wild birds, or birds not habituated to living around people, will leave their pellets in places where we are much less likely to find them. Therefore, we don't hear about them as much.

All of the hunting birds (owls, hawks, falcons, eagles, egrets, herons and terns—any bird that eats other animals) will ingest large amounts of inedible stuff when they eat. Birds will catch something to eat, tear it into pieces they can swallow (owls usually only catch things they can swallow whole, as do most of the fishing birds) and end up swallowing lots of skin, fur, feathers and bone.

The stuff that they can not digest is compressed in the gizzard and then regurgitated out. Between the time when an animal that makes a pellet has eaten something and regurgitated the pellet, it can not eat again because the pellet is blocking its digestive tract.

Snakes also eat all of their prey and make a pellet of the indigestible stuff.

Predators will often have pieces of bone or fur in their scat. If something they ate was indigestible, it will pass through their digestive tract and be part of their poo. If a large predator, eat something small (a coyote eating a field mouse for instance) their scat can be as interesting to examine as an owl pellet.

We are lucky we have thumbs and can operate a knife and fork; we do not have to swallow our food in huge pieces. We eat only the parts of our food that we can digest; we don't need to make pellets. If we did, sitting around watching television after dinner would be a much different experience...