

# Wildlife at COAM: Barn Owls

## Barn Owl Facts

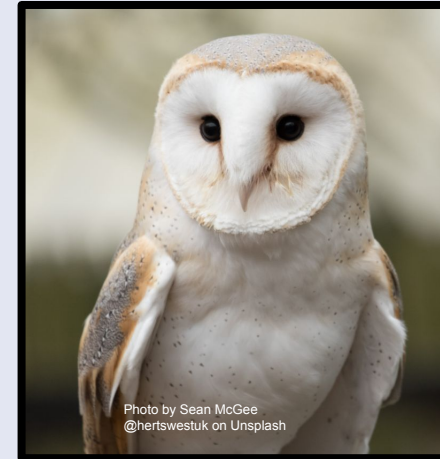
Scientific name: *Tyto alba*

You can see barn owls all year round and they are best spotted at dusk

Barn owls have a heart-shaped face, brown and grey wings, and a white underside with small brown spots

They mainly eat mice, voles and shrews

A baby barn owl is called an Owlet



Their **habitat** is usually farmland, grassland and wetland

A barn owl will swallow its prey whole and anything that cannot be digested (bones, teeth etc.) are **regurgitated** (coughed up) as black pellets

A barn owl's call sounds more like a screech, rather than a hoot



Barn owls use their long legs, toes and **talons** (claws) to catch their prey in long grass

Barn owls are **nocturnal** (active at night). Although they may hunt at dusk and dawn when they have owlets, or during the day in the winter

## Barn Owls at COAM



A fresh pellet on the ground below the nest box in Northolt Barn



### How do we know that we have Barn Owls at COAM?

We know that we have Barn Owls on our site because of the **pellets** they deposit around our nest boxes. We know that these are Barn Owl pellets as they are black when they are fresh. These pellets can show us what small animals the Barn Owls have found around our site to prey on.

Another way we know that we have Barn Owls on site are the **feathers** they leave behind. Occasionally we can find feathers on the ground around the entrance to the nest boxes.

### Owl Nest Boxes

At the museum we have put **nest boxes** high up in two of our barns to give our local owls a safe place to nest. The boxes are in the Dutch Barn and Northolt Barn. The nest box at Northolt Barn is located inside the building however it has an entrance hole on the outside end of the building (see photo, circled). This means that the box is always accessible to the owls, even when the main doors are closed, whilst still being sheltered by the roof of the building.





## Dissecting Barn Owl Pellets

A pellet before dissection



A good way to learn more about the Barn Owls we have at the museum is by dissecting (taking apart) the pellets which the pellets which have been regurgitated by the owl and have fallen to the ground. From dissecting the pellets we are able to tell which animals they have been eating by looking at the remains. We are able to clean off the small bones and even sometimes reconstruct an almost complete skeleton of a small animal! From the pellets that we have discovered at COAM most often we have found that the owls have been eating field mice, field voles and pygmy shrews (we find that they seem to catch field mice most often). Here are some photos of the pellets we have dissected at COAM, and what we have found inside...

A pellet during dissection



Finding and identifying bones

A collection of bones from several pellets



Safety Message: You may find pellets out in the wild or buy them online from owl charity websites if you wish to dissect one yourself. Please ensure that you always wash your hands really well with soap and water after touching any pellets.

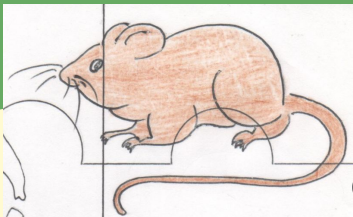
## Some Barn Owl Activities!

**Spotting a barn owl** - the best chance of spotting a barn owl is in areas of rough grassland where they can find food. It is best to look out for them on still evenings, when there is little wind. Best spotted along field margins (such as the area between the field crop and a hedgerow) at dusk. You can find more about specific areas to visit online.

**Read a book** - There are lots of lovely story books about owls. One of our favourites is *Owl Babies* by Martin Waddell. You can also find lots of non-fiction books which will tell you more about owls.

### Create an Owl Mask (template on following page)

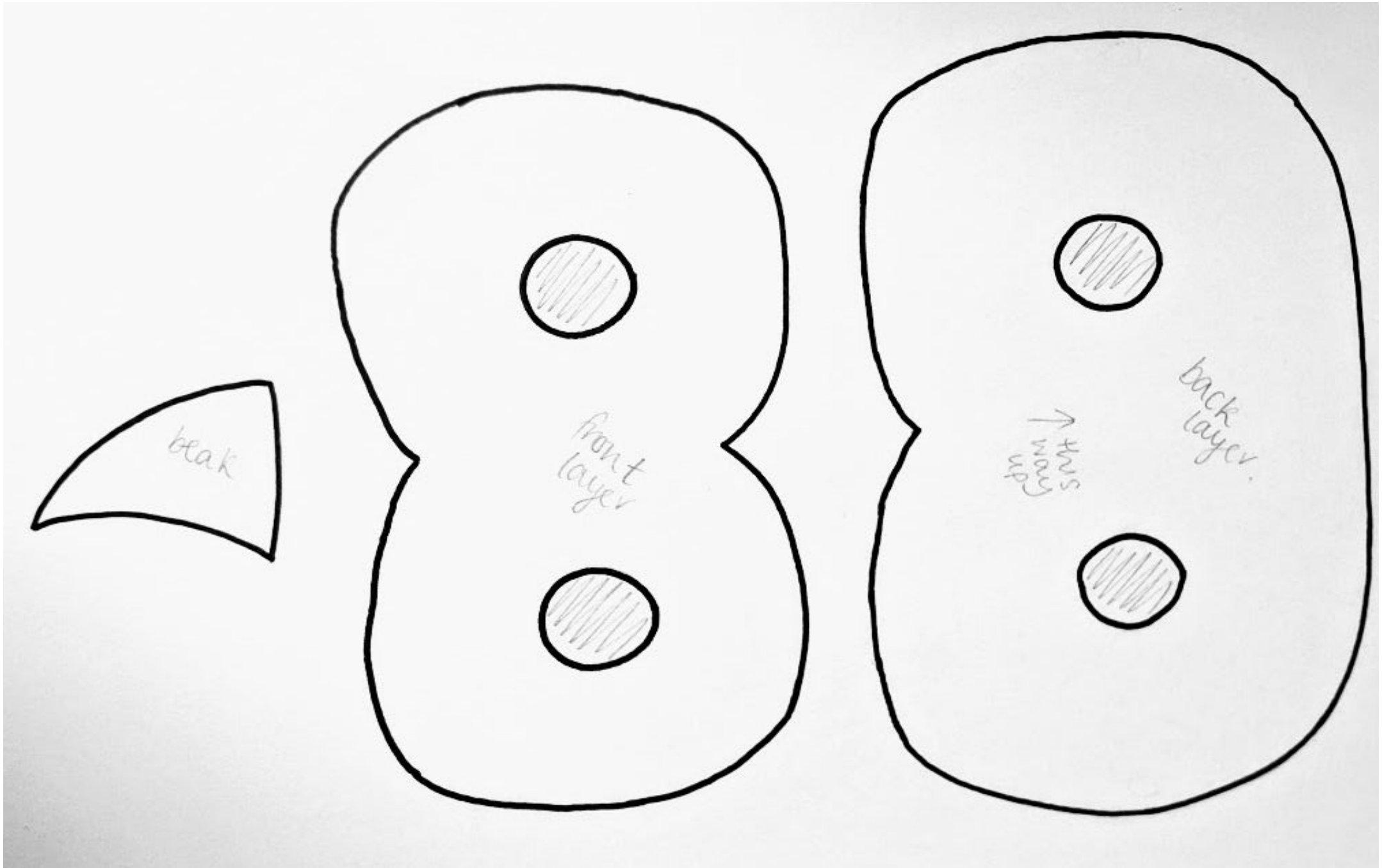
Either print out the template provided or draw the mask shape yourself at home. Cut out the shapes and eye holes and glue the front layer onto the back layer, matching up the eye holes. Decorate as you wish and then glue the beak onto the front layer. Punch a hole on either side of the mask and attach string. You could use photographs online as inspiration for your barn owl. On ours we chose to frame the face with brown, orange and grey 'feathers'.



**Mouse jigsaw** (on final page). We find lots of mice bones in the pellets from our barn owls. Can you print out the jigsaw, cut it out and muddle up the pieces to try and put them back together again? Once completed are you able to label the parts of the mouse with the labels we have provided? Can you find out the labels we have missed and add these?

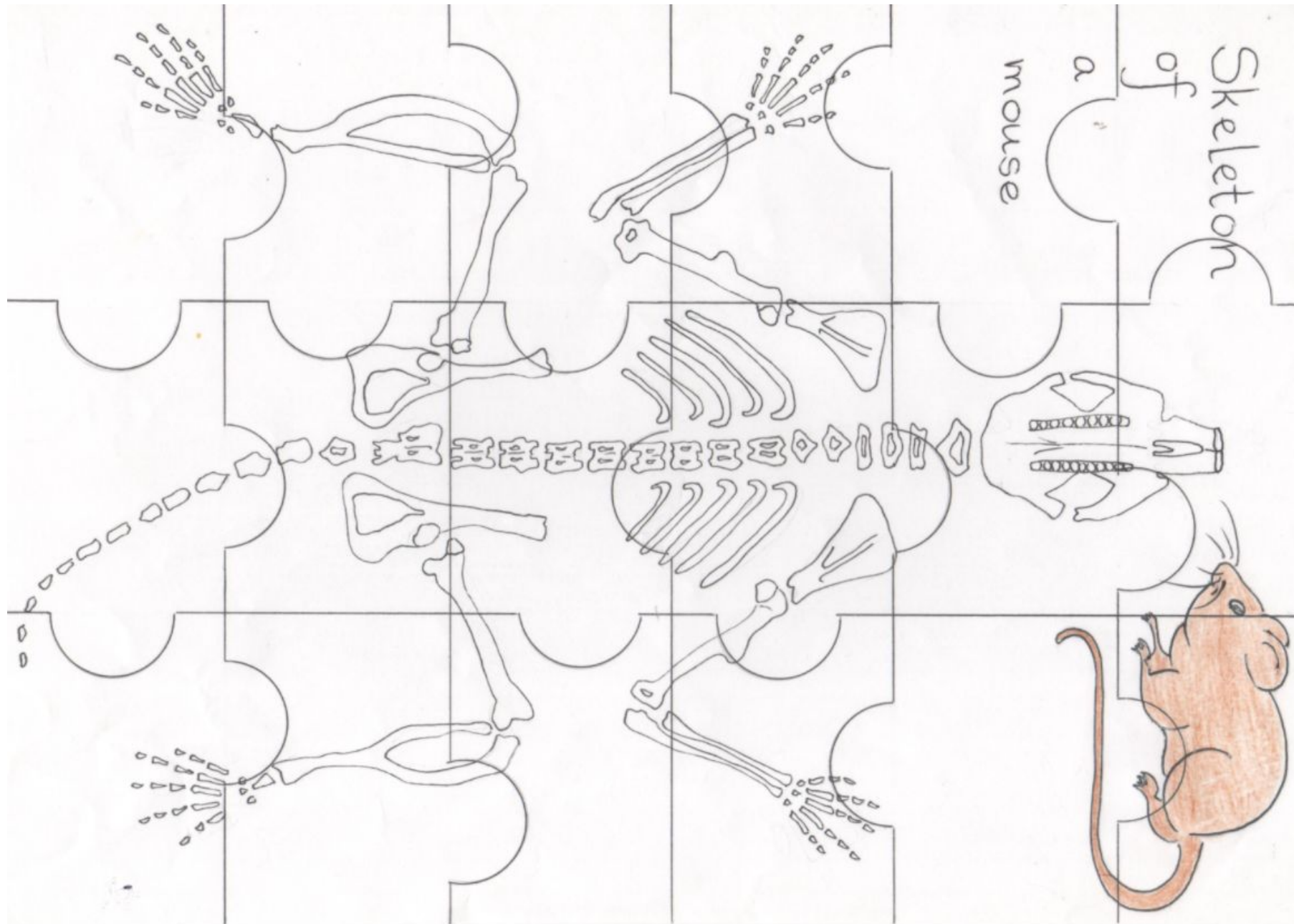
**We'd love to see your owl masks, make sure to tag us in any creations #COAMAtHome.**

## Barn Owl Mask Template





## Mouse Jigsaw with labels



Skeleton  
of  
a  
mouse

- Skull**
- Pelvis**
- Metacarpals**
- Scapula**
- Ribs**
- Caudal Vertebrae**
- Metatarsals**
- Vertebrae**
- Femur**