

The head of the rabbit had been completely digested and the front legs almost so. The headless remains were whole and showed no external damage. Faeces in the lower alimentary canal contained hair and five rabbits teeth. A small portion of jaw bone with two teeth still in place was also present. Length of rabbit remains from neck to base of tail was 16cm, girth 13cm. With the head present this rabbit would have been at least 19cm long. The snake was in excellent condition internally and weighed (stomach empty) 850 grams. Rabbits are extremely common in the valley and may be a regular part of the diet of large specimens of *N.a. humphreysi*.

At 2.00 pm on the 3rd of December, 1985 an adult *N.a. humphreysi*, 107cm long, was observed feeding on two fledgling sparrow chicks, *Passer domesticus*. The snake was living in the sandstone ruins of a house in a paddock on the 'Mountainvale' property approximately 4.5 km from the Liffey Valley in northern Tasmania.

The sparrows nest was situated in a cavity in a weathered section of wall 150cm from the ground.

The snake was discovered foraging around the ruins and soon after it began to climb the wall by first utilising blackberries growing against the wall to a height of 60cm, and scaled the remaining 90cm by winding up depressions in the weathered and uneven surface of the wall. The entrance hole leading to the nest was some 6cm across and the snake crawled in to a depth of approximately 18cm.

As the snake entered the hole distressed chirping could be heard from within. After several minutes the snake retreated with a large sparrow chick, half swallowed head first. The snake then allowed itself to drop to the ground where it finished swallowing the chick. The snake then returned to the hole in the same manner and entered again. The snake remained with its head in the hole for five minutes. It then withdrew performing the post meal gaping of the mouth characteristic of this species after it feeds. A large bulge was travelling down the snake's body, indicating a second chick had been eaten. The sparrow chicks were well grown, with well developed feathers, and were nearly ready to leave the nest. The snake then returned to the ground and basked in a loose coil.

Many thanks to Dr Bob Brown for bringing the snake on his property to my attention.

FUNNELWEBB'S FATAL FINAL FLING

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On the 3rd November, 1983, Mrs Richardson of Collinsvale donated a female Funnelweb spider (*Hadronyche venenata*) to the Tasmanian Museum. The spider was placed in a glass box with soil about 8 cm deep covering the bottom.

She quickly made a burrow and, except for rare glimpses of her at the entrance, I barely knew she was there for the next 3 years. Flies put into the case during the day were gone the next morning, and draglines of web around the case also showed that she was active at night. The entrance to the web was un-

sophisticated with just a few triplines extending from the burrow's entrance.

The next six months passed without my seeking her at all and eventually even flies were left untouched. Convinced that she had died I decided to exhume the body. Cautious digging revealed the silken nest about 1 cm from the floor of the case. No movement. Still careful, but gaining confidence, I prised open the end of the nest with long forceps.

Out rushed a very healthy, large funnelweb ready to do instant battle! I landed six feet away.

As rather a mess had been made of her nest I caught and removed the spider and rearranged the soil in the case. The nest proved to have a cast skin inside. As mature female funnelwebs are thought to moult annually it was interesting to note only the one cast.

When the spider was placed back in the case she soon made another burrow. This time, however, her behaviour was different. For the next year she could always be seen just inside the entrance, either facing out or with abdomen out. Flies were eaten overnight but mealworms were always rejected. (Most funnelwebs will not eat mealworms, which are readily accepted by most other spiders).

By 1988 I had had her for over four years and had grown, if not fond of her, at least attached (not literally) to her. Female funnelwebs are estimated to live up to seven years or more. Males die soon after reaching sexual maturity.

During April, 1988, her behaviour changed again. While people were fearfully bringing male funnelwebs to the museum, as happens every autumn, my room-mate was 'feathering her own nest'. Up until this time she had never made a fuss over the burrow. Now she built extensive and impressive sheets of web, with a classic funnel from the entrance of the burrow, fanning out to a radius of 10cm.

By May she was sitting outside on the web most of the time and looking rather out-of-condition. All her gloss had gone and she looked dull and dusty.

On Thursday 12th May, at 3.15 pm, I noticed that she was starting to moult. As funnelwebs, like most spiders, moult in the safety of the retreat or nest because they are very vulnerable at this time, I was surprised to see her moulting out of the burrow in broad daylight.

By 4.00 pm she had removed the 3rd and 4th pairs of legs from the old skin and half of the abdomen skin and peeled off. However, even though funnelwebs usually take several hours to moult, by 5.00 pm it appeared that all was not well. She was very weak and there seemed to be some damage to the new carapace (upperside of the head section).

When I arrived at work next morning I quite expected to see her dead. She was still alive, but barely. One of the 2nd pair of legs was out and part of the 1st. However, the new carapace was split open and on Friday 13th, after 4½ years, my room-mate died.