

### Swiftlet Ups And Downs.

By Mike Tarburton.

The simple process of censusing the swiftlet colonies over the last five years has shown the effect that the two major predators have on these populations.

In summary, White-Rumped Swiftlet colonies that have Children's Pythons or Brown Tree Snakes preying on them have altered very little in size. Those colonies with a cat preying on them usually suffer a rapid decline. There is usually only one snake or one cat preying on any particular colony but their impact is very different. As snakes are cold blooded they eat fewer birds to satisfy their needs but cats (and possibly previously native cats) being warm blooded require more energy per body weight than snakes and so tend to decimate colonies until there are too few birds to sustain them.

The effect of cat predation was seen in the Clam Cavern colony where a cat reduced the colony to 11 breeding pairs in the 1985 and 1986 seasons. Following the cats removal, the colony rose to 32 pairs in 1989. The colony in Project 31 Cave declined from 253 in 1986 to 160 pairs in 1989 (I wonder if this may be due in part to that dinosaur Gordon says I saw there). [*Never said it was a dinosaur, it was a winged goanna, remember? GG*]. The colony in Swiftlet Cavern (Royal Arch Cave) declined due to cat predation from 122 nesting pairs in 1972 to 15 pairs in 1985. The cat predation stopped and by 1989 the colony had increased to 32 pairs.

The small effects of snake predation can be seen in Swiftlet Cave where the colony increased from 129 breeding pairs in 1986 to 189 pairs in 1989. Shirl's Triple Twirl colony increased from 21 pairs in 1986 to 37 pairs in the 1989/90 season. The side colony at Golgotha Cave had a python in the entrance passage every time I have visited and the scats are always full of swiftlet feathers, but the colony has grown from 48 pairs in 1985 to 54 pairs in 1989/90. The bottom colony has grown from 81 pairs in 1985 (when a huge Brown Tree Snake scared Alan and Peter Cummins and myself, but obviously not the breeding birds!) to 112 pairs last season.

The colony in Keefs Cavern has grown from 109 pairs in 1985 to 185 pairs in 1989/90, and the tiny colony of 4 pairs seen in Stop Press Cave in 1986 had increased to 15 pairs in 1989/90.

From these and other data, it would seem that cavers are not interfering very much (if at all) with the breeding White-rumped Swiftlet Colonies, so from the birds themselves a big Thank You!

*Mike Tarburton.*