

Natural Vermin Control

by Monica Strauss

WE are very lucky to have our own Vermin Controller living in our house at Toodyay. It is a small *Varanus tristis*, who moved inside our roof some 10 weeks ago. Our leathery-looking black friend enters via a gap between the external brick fireplace wall and the roof. He appears to have taken up permanent residence, and is doing the most wonderful job exterminating any mice or rats that are wishing to move into the roof space. So much better than having to set traps!

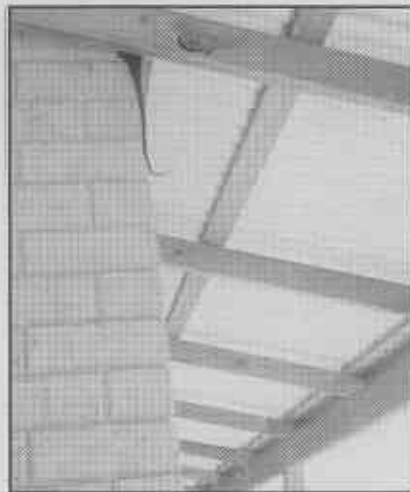
We used to sometimes hear the pitter and patter of tiny feet, now we hear thump, thud and squeak, and on occasions, a little later, see a smug looking black monitor reclining on the outside rafters. He (or she?) also wanders daily about the garden, mostly looking very furtive, the curled tail held high a giveaway. Only once have I seen it with the tail flat on the ground, looking more gloomy and depressed than ever, and that was after it got watered by accident.

V. tristis also hunts in our feed shed, which is some 40 m away from



the house. I saw it with a freshly-caught rat, which was so big it didn't seem possible that he could eat it, but eat it he did. When next I looked, only the rat's tail was hanging out of his mouth. Some time later he came home, slowly made his way up the brick wall, stomach bulging, and went inside the roof. Vermin control without traps or poison!

The only disturbance that his presence causes is to the people-friendly birds, wren and robin, who are not frequenting our small garden as much as they normally would. His presence does not upset resident bobtails, nor the carpet python that



has been spending the last few days in a wandoo next to the house. However, absent is a mulga snake that we have seen around the area for a number of years and I wonder if it is keeping away because of *tristis*.

Another thing perhaps worth mentioning is the fact that this summer is the best for bungarra [*V. gouldii* – Ed.] that we have seen since buying the property in 1990. There are always quite a good number about, but this year there are bungarra, in all sizes, just everywhere. I wonder if others have noticed this also?