MEMBERS' PAGE

THE WEB TAKES OVER THE MAIL BOX

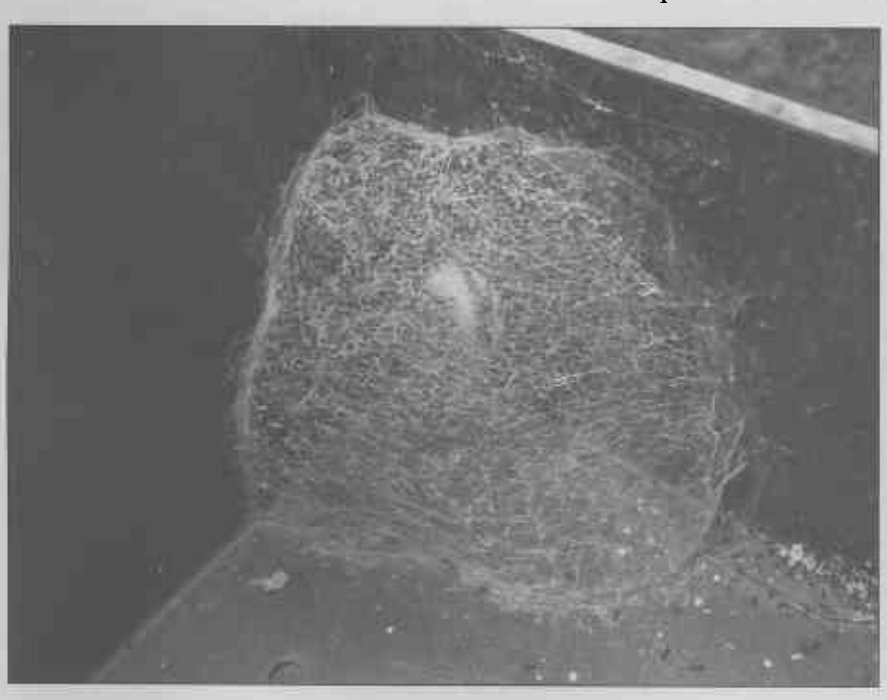
Sylvia Leighton

VAL AND STEVE DAVIES of Gull Rock (just east of Albany) provide us with another interesting 'nature observation'.

In the early winter months they noticed they had a resident grey huntsman spider living in their letterbox, which made it a bit tricky sometimes removing letters. However, over time they established a fairly respectful relationship with the spider and the mail deliveries didn't seem to cause too much disturbance. Then one day they were most surprised when they noticed a web suddenly appear in the corner of the letterbox and the huntsman spider appeared to hide under the web. Most people are under the impression that huntsman spiders don't make webs. The web extended all the way across the letterbox's width and half way up it forming a right angled triangle at the delivery end of the letterbox. It seemed to be several layers thick and was very tough – they poked it a couple of times with a stick. Val and Steve were even more surprised when a few weeks later they noticed all these baby huntsman spiders running around underneath the web. Some of the babies were on the mother's back (or is it the father?) and some were inadvertently brought in with the mail, despite trying to leave them all behind! Over the next week the baby spiders seemed to disperse with many of them also dying inside the letterbox.

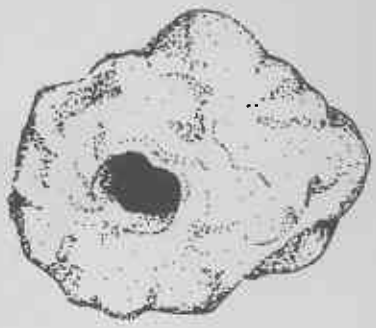
Land For Wildlife contacted Barbara York Main, who has studied spiders nearly all her life, for comment on these observations.

"Huntsman spiders usually live under bark or rocks and they often enclose openings of the shelters with silk. Some actually live in holes in the ground lined with silk and may even make trapdoors to burrows. The female spider makes an egg cocoon like a little pillow. In some species it is more circular. Usually the young stay for a while and then disperse but at least one species of Delena *is social and several generations may live happily together in bark shelters. Technically a 'web' is a silk snare. Apart from* Delena *the only other non-snare building social spiders that we know of are several species of* Diaea *(a crab spider – family Thomisidae). I made this discovery at West Cape Howe and it is written up in Main B Y (1988)* Biology of a social thomisid spider *in 'Australian Arachnology Eds AD Austin & NW Heather (The Australian Entomological Society , Brisbane. Miscellaneous Publication No. 5). Subsequently Theo Evans has described the eastern Australian social* Diaea *spiders as several distinct species. David Rowell discovered the social behaviour of* Delena *and he has published several papers on its behaviour & genetics."*



BUSH DETECTIVE

Note something unusual? Ask *LFW*!



Mt Marshall Shire have been doing up the road outside the Mukinbudin Hotel, in the process bringing in loads of gravel. Many of the gravel nodules have a smooth, cylindrical hole in them. 'How was this made?' we were asked.

Those members who have been in *LFW* from the very beginning will, of course, know the answer! In Western Wildlife Vol 1 no 3, July 1997, we featured this as the 'Bush Detective'.

For those people who have joined *LFW* since then, here is the info on - fossil bees' nests!

In some laterite areas, gravel nodules with a smooth cylindrical hole in the centre may be found. They are the remains of the burrow of a solitary bee, which laid its egg in a cell constructed in soft clay while the laterite was forming, millions of years ago! The fossil closely resembles the larval structures of some modern native bees.