

Fake caves and real glow-worms: Building and managing an artificial glow-worm cave

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Abstract

Glow-worm viewing by tourists in southeast Queensland is restricted entirely to after dark trips to rainforests and overhangs. The initial concept for our artificial glow-worm cave arose from concern over increased visitor numbers to particular sections of Tamborine National Park at night. As an alternative to these nightly activities, Tamborine Mountain National Parks personnel, keen to alleviate some of this high tourism pressure, suggested the creation of an artificial cave environment, perfectly suited for glow-worms, where viewing could occur during the day. Construction of the concrete cave took over fourteen months with many months of follow-up fine tunings. Introduction of the local species of glow-worm, *Arachnocampa flava*, to the cave began in late 2004, with a small colony established in the cave before the annual glow-worm breeding season.

Glow-worms require very specific environmental conditions and the cave has been fitted with equipment to maintain these conditions throughout the year, thereby providing the perfect environment for a healthy glow-worm colony year round. It is envisaged that the cave population will become self-sufficient. The prey items (small fly species) needed to sustain the glow-worms are currently breeding and developing in a mulch and pond system within the cave. This paper outlines the process of construction, the factors needed for a healthy glow-worm colony living in an artificial habitat, and gives a basic layout of our glow-worm tours.