

Herald Cafe

The Snake Man of India tells his tale



Romulus Krait

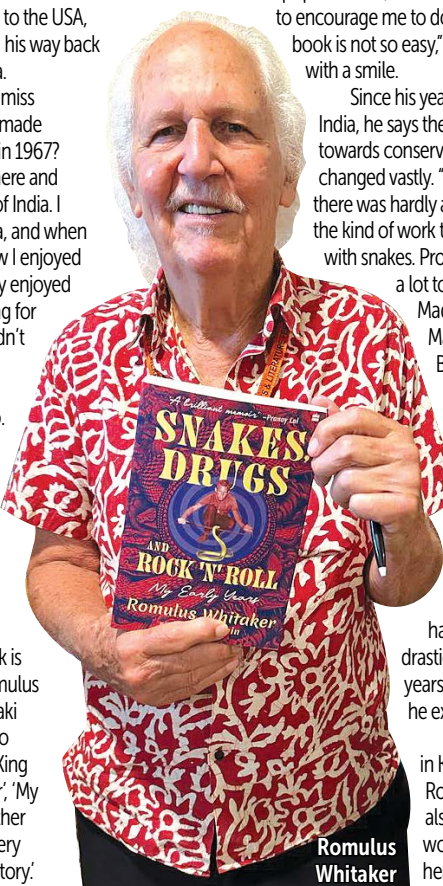
Noted wildlife conservationist, Romulus Whitaker talks about his memoir, 'Snakes, Drugs and Rock 'n' Roll' and his love for conservation of wildlife

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Octogenarian Romulus Whitaker came to India first as a six-year-old and then as a 24-year-old. While one might think that the well-known herpetologist and wildlife conservationist and the founder of the Madras Snake Park and the Madras Crocodile Bank Trust, will be a serious man, on the contrary, Romulus is a happy-go-lucky person, who never gets tired of what he is doing.

When Romulus came to India in 1951, he was admitted in Kodaikanal International School where he had a pet python in the boarding school. However, it was his mother that introduced him to the world of reptiles as she said 'It's beautiful' when he brought home a snake for the first time. After a short visit back to the USA, Romulus earned his way back to Mumbai, India.

What did he miss about India that made him come back in 1967? "My family was here and the excitement of India. I enjoyed America, and when I think about how I enjoyed America, I mostly enjoyed going out looking for snakes. So wouldn't this be a much more exciting place? I guess so. I was just used to India," says Romulus, who penned all his early memories in the book, 'Snakes, Drugs and Rock 'n' Roll'. The book is authored by Romulus and his wife Janaki Lenin, who is also the author of 'A King Cobra's Summer', 'My Husband and Other Animals' and 'Every Creature Has A Story'.



Romulus Whitaker

TWO SNAKES NAMED AFTER ROMULUS WHITAKER

ERYX WHITAKERI

Eryx whitakeri also known as Whitaker's sand boa or Whitaker's boa is common in Goa, and the Western Ghats. It's a non-venomous snake, that eats rats and mice.

BUNGARUS ROMULUS

Romulus' krait or Bungarus Romulus is a krait which is named after Romulus' first name, is a very venomous snake. It's found in Karnataka.

This book is part of a trilogy. "The first book took five years as we have a lot of old notebooks to look through of all the stuff that I did over the years. This is the first 24 years. The second book will be another 25 years. The third book another 25 years. I am in 80s now. For the first volume, it was letters from my mother and stuff that she kept. But for the second volume and the third volume, it's stacks of notebooks. But to do a popular book, it took a while for people to encourage me to do that. Writing a book is not so easy," says Romulus with a smile.

Since his years working in India, he says the perspective towards conservation has changed vastly. "When I first came, there was hardly anybody doing the kind of work that I'm doing with snakes. Probably thanks

a lot to the original Madras Snake Park, Madras Crocodile Bank Trust, lots of young people have become interested. Not only because of me, but because of just a general awareness and interest. Things have changed drastically over the years," he explains.

Currently based in Karnataka, Romulus has also been closely working with Goan herpetologists.

"Rahul Alvares wrote a book about snakes in Goa and I wrote the foreword for his book. I've known these guys like Nirmal Kulkarni for a long time. Rahul spent time at the Madras Crocodile Bank when he was just a student. We call them all graduates, even though it's not a school. It's like they've learned hands-on experience how to handle animals," says Romulus.

Romulus has two snakes named after him, a boa and a krait. "I guess they discover a new snake and they respect me as a person who's been doing a lot of work. And it's a way of paying respect to me. I don't really approve of that because I prefer, when they name a snake, they should name it after the colour of the snake or the description of where it came from. But anyway, I'm proud," says Romulus humbly.

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-Romulus Whitaker

The dynamic team of Romulus and Janaki are trying to finish the second volume this year, and the third volume probably next year. "We want to make it interesting for people, exciting and fun. People should enjoy reading it," concludes Romulus.



EATING RIGHT IN RESTAURANTS



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SWIPE RIGHT

Sanya Malhotra admits 'companion makes life beautiful'



Rishab Sharma, the actress opened up about relationships and marriage, admitting that she does believe in companionship, adding that "love is such a beautiful thing." When questioned about how life changes with a companion, Sanya replied, "I think it makes life beautiful. Maybe it's love—it's always nice to share love. Love is such a beautiful feeling."

'Hitch' director says making film with Will Smith was a battle



Sweet Home Alabama, said in an interview surrounding the film's 20th anniversary that he and Smith, 56, "had our difficulties" during production. "The movie I wanted to make and the movie Will wanted to make, neither one of those movies is as good as the movie we made together. It was a battle," said Tennant.

A festival that opens the world of words

Author Shanta Gokhale emphasizes the power of silence and Sumana Roy, the language of plants in their keynote speeches at the opening of the 13th Goa Arts and Literature Festival (GALF) at Dona Paula



Shanta Gokhale delivering the GALF keynote



Sumana Roy delivering her keynote address at GALF

GALF artwork by Sonia Rodrigues Sabharwal being unveiled at GALF inaugural

Shahitya Akademi awardee Shanta Gokhale emphasized the power of silence in her thought provoking keynote address at the inauguration function of the 13th Goa Arts and Literature Festival at the International Centre Goa (ICG). Gokhale cited the example of rampant demolition and construction activity in her Mumbai neighbourhood and lamented how silence, particularly in an urban environment had almost become impossible. The otherwise soft spoken Shanta Gokhale said, "I feel this great

urge to turn violent. But I can hardly throw the noisy excavators into the sea." Academic and author Sumana Roy who delivered the first keynote address

threw the spotlight on the language of plants. Quoting the works of scientist Jagdish Chandra Bose, Roy explained how Bose was ridiculed for stating that plants and trees could actually have feelings identical to human beings. "People ridiculed Bose in his time. However, modern science has proved that plants indeed feel stress and pain," Roy said. The other highlights of the evening included the unveiling

of the GALF artwork made by artist, Sonia Rodrigues Sabharwal. A beautiful image of a goddess, who Sabharwal referred as the goddess of art and literature surrounded by the elements of earth, water, fire and air and the Aboli flowers of Goa. Konkani poet Ramesh Ghadi read out his poems and noted author, William Dalrymple was interviewed by Padmabhushan awardee Vidya Dehejia. The festival will continue today, February 15 at the International Centre Goa and is open and free to the public.