# Romulus Whitaker: The 'Snakeman of India' and His Legacy



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Romulus Whitaker, an American-born herpetologist, relocated to India as a child in the 1950s and has since dedicated over six decades to reptile research and conservation. Known as the "Snakeman of India," Whitaker has authored several books on snakes, spearheaded an anti-venom program, and established numerous wildlife research stations across India. His work has extended from reptiles to rainforests, contributing significantly to environmental conservation efforts.

Whitaker’s journey began in northern New York State, where his fascination with snakes started at a young age. His move to India after his mother remarried opened up new opportunities for him. In 1960, Whitaker trained at Miami Serpentarium under Bill Haast, focusing on venom extraction from king cobras. Subsequently, he established India's first snake park, the Madras Snake Park, in 1969.

A significant part of Whitaker's conservation efforts involved partnering with the indigenous Irula tribe in South India to create a venom cooperative. This initiative provided employment to the Irulas, who extracted venom from captured snakes for anti-venom production, later releasing the snakes back into the wild. This anti-venom has saved millions of lives.

Whitaker also focused on reducing snakebite mortality rates in India. He co-authored major papers from the Million Deaths Study, revealing that nearly 50,000 snakebite deaths occur annually in India. This led to a national educational campaign teaching preventive measures, such as using lights at night and employing sticks while working in fields.

Whitaker's conservation efforts gained momentum in the 1970s when he noticed the near extinction of crocodiles. He established field stations, serving as hubs for future conservationists in India. His current work includes writing a three-part memoir, the first volume titled "Snakes, Drugs, and Rock 'n' Roll: My Early Years."

Today, Whitaker resides in Mysore, southwestern India, concentrating on snakebite prevention education. His legacy endures through his significant contributions to reptile research and conservation.