



## Janaki Lenin's colourful world

*Sakal Times, Pune. 11 November 2012*

*Sonia Krishna Kurup*

Did you know that many animals go to great lengths to get drunk? That the sex of a crocodile is determined, not by its genes, but by the temperature; incubating eggs at lower and higher temperatures produce girls and the in-between range boys? If these facts thrill you, I promise you there is more in Janaki Lenin's *My Husband and Other Animals* that won't leave you disappointed.

The book is a compilation of short stories which Janaki – a wildlife writer and filmmaker, had written earlier for her columns in *The Hindu MetroPlus*. There are around 90 stories in the collection, with each story being not more than three pages. Well-written and insightful, these stories are an easy and enjoyable read. And with a strong imagination, it can switch on some Animal Planet like action in your mind's eye too.

Of course, I haven't forgotten Janaki's famous husband Rom Whitaker, mentioned in the title. Rom is a well-known herpetologist and wildlife conservationist. He is also the founder of the Madras Snake Park, and an inspiration for many of Janaki's stories. One of the funny incidences Janaki writes about him is on his colour blindness. "Once when Rom was on a trip to the US, I asked him to buy me a jacket," Janaki writes. "I guess my expression soured when I saw the gaudy green colour. Rom asked innocently, "Isn't it grey?"



Janaki's portrayal of Rom, although amusing, is very sketchy. The writer gives only glimpses of her relationship with Rom, while casting him mainly as a cool 'dude', in love with the world of animals, especially reptiles. Moreover, it seems that Janaki is making a conscious effort to place Rom in every story.

I feel that the writer very often digresses a lot from the stories she begins with. For instance, she would start a story with "Rom couldn't have chosen a better moment to propose," and narrate a completely different tale about Magpie-robins and crocs finding a place to lay eggs!

Having said this, I think that Janaki's book has plenty of lessons and tips to offer for nature lovers. She can make the simplest of stories interesting with her wit and draw something valuable out of every experience. Her pleasant, funny and sometimes bitter brush with wildlife makes for an interesting read.