

the photographer Jan Latta

Q. WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO LEAVE ADVERTISING AND START A CAREER IN PHOTOGRAPHY?

I came face to face with a mountain gorilla in Rwanda. The experience changed my life. When my guide said there were fewer than 600 mountain gorillas left in the world, I decided to create books for children on endangered animals. To do that I became a photographer to tell the story. And to tell the story, I photograph animals in their natural habitat in the wild.

Q. WHOSE PHOTOGRAPHY DO YOU ADMIRE AND WHY?

Karl Ammann. He lives in Africa and has captured amazing images of wild animals. He was my mentor when I was learning to be a photographer. *Time* magazine called him "Hero of the Environment". His mission in life is to save endangered species and stop the bush-meat trade.

Q. WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR MOST SATISFYING PROJECT TO DATE?

The *Diary of a Wildlife Photographer* book. I was so excited when the ABC asked me to write this book, but I was stunned when they said I had to write 20,000 words. Then they suggested I design the book – a great compliment. It took me six months to rewrite my diary notes and two months to edit thousands of photographs for the final 300 that were selected for the text.

Q. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE UNIQUE CHALLENGES YOU HAVE FACED AS A WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER?

My challenge in Africa is finding a good experienced guide. He needs the knowledge to find the animal, know how close he can get me and when we need to escape. Going to India to create a book about tigers was a challenge. I didn't see a tiger for three weeks, then when I did see one, the jeep was not allowed to go off the dirt track. Finally, I rode an elephant every day so I could go into the jungle in a natural way. Then the challenge of trying to focus on a running tiger on top of a lumbering elephant. I had published a panda book but wanted to reprint after 16 babies were born. It was so difficult getting permission to go to Wolong in China. I was a single person, not part of a group. They were suspicious. But after many weeks, I hired a driver and interpreter and we made the terrifying four-hour drive up the mountain. My reward was playing with 16 adorable baby pandas.

Q. WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO PRODUCE THE 'TRUE TO LIFE' SERIES?

First, I was inspired by the endangered mountain gorillas. Then, I had some amazing experiences. I've played with chimps in Uganda and pandas in the mountains of China. I've walked with lions in Zambia and been charged by elephants in Amboseli. A cheetah came up to me in Nanyuki and I've held the horn of a rhino. I wanted to publish books about these animals and share my adventures with children.

Q. WHAT IS THE SECRET TO BEING A SUCCESSFUL BOOK PUBLISHER?

For accurate information I do months of research and talk to experienced guides. Then I spend weeks following the animal that is the focus of the next book. Observing animals in their natural habitat is the only way to write the story. I usually write a rough draft in my tent every night when I know I've taken the right photograph. I write the final copy when I've edited all the photographs.

Q. ARE YOU WORKING ON ANY SPECIAL PROJECTS NOW?

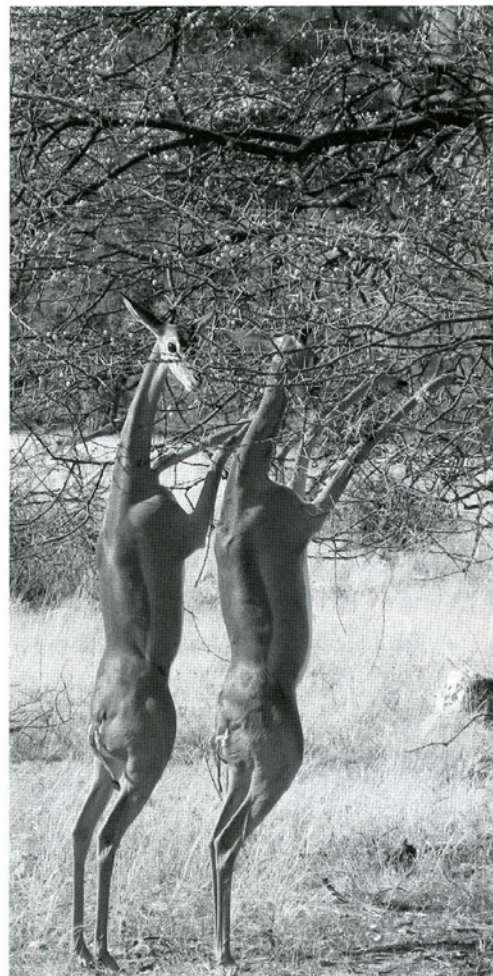
Yes, I'm leaving next month for Borneo to photograph and write about orangutans. I've written the draft and I've completed my photographic "wish-list" for the next book. I was in Africa early this year to photograph leopards, but I need to return when the guides find leopard cubs. Often a book takes two trips to Africa to complete – a very expensive process.

Q. IF YOU WEREN'T TAKING PHOTOS WHAT WOULD YOU BE DOING?

Drawing and painting animals.



This is the most magical moment of my life – with two cheetahs near Mt Kenya. I have my hand on the cheetah's throat to feel the vibration of his purring.



The elegant gerenuk always stand up to eat. These were photographed in Sambura near my camp.



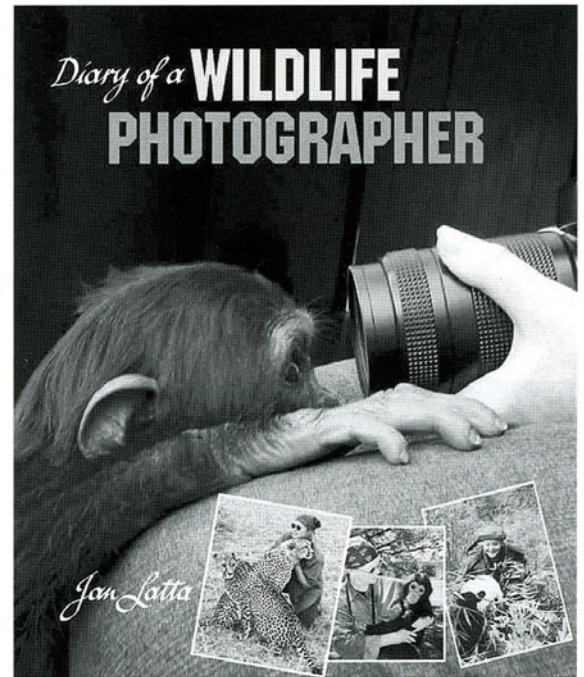
I'm nervously crawling up to a rhino for some close-up photographs, hoping he is going to stay asleep.



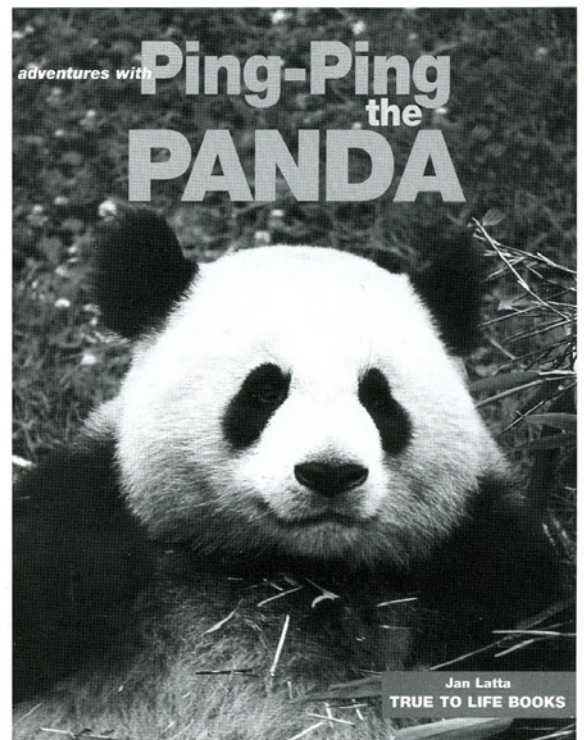
I visited a Maasai village with my guide to see how they lived. This plump little Maasai baby was curious about me.



I walked with four lions with the Lion Encounter guides in Zambia. This one is showing me his sharp teeth.



The ABC asked me to write *Diary of a Wildlife Photographer* book. A challenge to write 20,000 words and edit thousands of images.



Ping-ping the Panda. This is one of the 10 True to Life Books, educating children about endangered animals. All ten books have been selected in the NSW Premier's reading Challenge.

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