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Joyee Chan learns the tricks of the trade from noted wildlife photographer Jan Latta

The location of a favourite afternoon hangout of a leap of leopards. The exact moment a mischievous panda cub will push its drowsy friend off its bed. How gerenuk, a breed of long-necked antelopes, feast on tender leaves of tall bushes by standing on their hind legs. Knowing these things is the secret to some magical images, says Jan Latta, a noted wildlife photographer.

"Anticipating the animal's next move is key," Latta told *Young Post* before speaking at last month's Young Readers Festival.

"It gets back to your homework - knowing their behaviour [and] body language. Because you will never get to see the animal in that place and that pose again."

A face-to-face encounter with a mountain gorilla in Rwanda in 1994 prompted the Australian to embark on a 14-year career documenting endangered species in Southeast Asia and Africa.

"I was devastated to learn that there were only 600 of these magnificent creatures left in the world" she says.

Gorillas became the subject of her first book. Her True to Life series of picture books for children has 12 titles so far. She believes man's next generation could change the fate of animals that are close to extinction, so these books are hugely important to her.

Having travelled all over the world, Latta says her favourite place is Africa's Maasai Mara National Reserve, in Kenya. There's something remarkable, she says, about its open grassy plains and days filled with interesting encounters.

Much of her photographic success comes from timing. She says it's best take your camera out at dawn or dusk as the golden sunlight guarantees brilliant pictures.

"Try to get a light in [the animal's] eyes or click the camera when it looks at you. It's very compelling,"

Latta says.

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Jan Latta bonds with a pair of cheetahs.

Photo: Jan Latta

A walk on the wild side