

14 October 2023 – Wildlife Ranching South Africa gathered members and special guests for a two-day Conference at Irene Country Lodge, Centurion, from 13 to 14 October 2023. The weekend included the organisation's Annual General Meeting (AGM) as well as the Annual National Auction and the highlight of the year, the WRSA Gala Dinner & Awards Ceremony where the prestigious Wildlife Rancher of the Year 2023 was announced.

This year has truly been a year of celebration and transition in the wildlife industry! We witnessed a changing of the guard as long-serving directors gracefully stepped down, making way for new and enthusiastic leaders. Tebogo Mogashoa and Gerhard Heyneke, our past-president and outgoing Chairman, left behind impressive legacies to uphold.

In this year's Annual National Auction, we didn't just meet our goals; we soared past them! The auction raised substantial funds to support the expansion plans of WRSA and bolster our organization's reserves. We're now better equipped to be at the forefront in promoting and defending the private wildlife sector when the need arises.

The grand highlight of the weekend was undoubtedly the 2023 Wildlife Rancher of the Year Award Ceremony, held during the annual WRSA Gala Dinner. The finalists included remarkable individuals, all of whom have made outstanding contributions to our industry.

The finalists included:

- Marco Smit of Nahla Safaris,
- Dirk De Bod (Dirk De Bod Safaris)
- Hannes Kotze (Morningside Game Breeders)
- Gideon Anderson (Zonnebloem Wildlife)
- Tienie Bamberger (Warthog Safaris)
- Chris Nortje (Buccara)

- Sean van Zyl (Fort Governor's Safaris)
- Flemming Jensen (Side by Side Safaris)

The judging panel had an exceedingly challenging task as the excellent candidates were near-impossible to separate.

“They are ambassadors and role models who are well equipped to mentor others. Heavily involved in the industry, they give significant attention to good governance – financial management, record keeping and managing people,” said Mr Jacques Kriek.

The judging panel included:

- Jacques Kriek from Mattanu Private Game Reserve,
- Pieter Ernst from Bona Bona,
- Rodney Davey from Romaco, and
- Wynand van Heerden from Van Heerden Boerdery.

- **The Awards**

Tourism Establishment of the Year 2023: Chris Nortje (Bucarra)

This remarkable establishment found the perfect balance between consumptive and non-consumptive tourism, promoting brand South Africa on an international scale

Best Use of Products 2023: Flemming Jensen (Side by Side Safaris)

With over 30 years of experience, this product found a niche market and added value by diversifying into tourism, hunting, and taxidermy.

Hunting establishment of the Year 2023 (Local and international):

Marco Smit (Nahla Safari's)

A young entrepreneur who turned his family business into an internationally known 5-star lodge and hunting experience.

Game Breeder of the Year 2023: Gideon Annderson (Zonnebloem Wildlife)

His dedication, attention to detail, and innovation in farming made him a true leader in the game breeding industry.

The WRSA Wildlife Rancher of the Year 2023: Tienie Bamberger (Warthog Safaris)

A self-made success story who expanded his establishment and diversified into tourism and taxidermy, promoting sustainable utilization.

These incredible individuals are true ambassadors and role models for our industry. We celebrate their achievements and dedication!

Jimie Malan WRSA Regional Interest Group of the Year 2023

We also recognized the essential work of our Regional Interest Groups and, with great pleasure, announced WRSA Naboom as the Jimie Malan WRSA Regional Interest Group of the Year 2023. Their innovation, increased member interest, and active participation in WRSA's initiatives make them vital to our industry's success.

WRSA Chairman's Award 2023

The Chairman's Award was announced as WRSA CEO, Richard York, for his unwavering passion and dedication to our organization. He has been instrumental in promoting the wildlife industry at a national and international level.

This year has been a true celebration of excellence and commitment within the wildlife industry. We look forward to what the future holds and continue to work together to protect and promote our beloved industry.

Cheers to all our winners and the bright
future ahead!