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Top award makes it 10 in row for Shamwari

[Guy Rogers](#) ENVIRONMENT & TOURISM EDITOR

FOR the 10th consecutive year, Shamwari Game Reserve has been named the leading game reserve and conservation company in the world.

The awards were announced on Wednesday during the World Travel Awards at a gala ceremony on Turks & Caicos Island in the Caribbean.

Hailed by the Wall Street Journal as "the travel industry's Oscars", the World Travel Awards are the culmination of the industry's most comprehensive and prestigious awards programme. More than 167 000 travel professionals worldwide voted this year for their favourites, across all sectors of the industry.

In an e-mailed message sent to Shamwari founder Adrian Gardiner, the president of the awards, Graham E Cooke, extended his congratulations "on being voted world's best by your fellow professionals across the globe".

The proud spokesman for the Mantis Collection, Shamwari's holding company, Kathleen Pretorius, said the awards event had been broadcast globally by BBC World and covered by several leading print publications.

The 25 000ha reserve near Paterson, north-east of Port Elizabeth, employs 325 permanent staff and boasts 55 mammal species, including the big five, as well as 80 reptile and 300 bird species. It includes an endangered species breeding centre, an anti-poaching unit to monitor especially its black rhino, a water monitoring system and a rescue and education sanctuary run in partnership with British group Born Free.

Gardiner, who elected to stay at home with his team to wait for news on the award rather than fly to the Caribbean, said yesterday he was very proud that Shamwari had succeeded in mainstreaming conservation as a tourist attraction, and emphasised that benefits had to be spread around.

"It is our firm commitment that tourism should benefit all people and not just a few."

On the conservation company award, he said this was a product of the investment put into Shamwari's conservation department. Because of its decade-long experience in land rehabilitation and species reintroduction, the 56-man department has been called on to consult on a range of outside projects in Abu Dhabi, Scotland and Rwanda to the Seychelles, Morocco and in South Africa. The unit includes two wildlife vets, an ecologist and an environmental manager.

On the "best reserve" award, Gardiner said that besides Shamwari's rich species diversity, the strong land rehabilitation aspect was key. "The fact that we have put back in order to achieve what we have, not piggy-backed on an existing pristine area, seems to really strike a chord with visitors."

He said the other factor behind the reserve's continued success at the WTA was that the awards were voted for by the travel industry, and more than 80% of Shamwari's visitors were brought there by the travel trade, rather than direct tourist business.

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