



Lion Sands' Jason Gipson wins Safari Guide of the Year 2025 at Prestigious National Awards

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23 June 2025

The prestigious Safari Guide of the Year Awards (SGOTY) has officially named **Jason Gipson** of Lion Sands Game Reserve as the 2025 **Safari Guide of the Year**, following an intense multi-day competition held at Kariega Game Reserve in the Eastern Cape.

Founded in 2011 by Mike Karantonis and endorsed by the Field Guides Association of Southern Africa (FGASA), the SGOTY Awards honour the finest in the field guiding profession, highlighting dedication, knowledge, and the ability to connect guests with the natural world in meaningful, memorable ways.

This year's finalists included five of South Africa's top field guides:

- **Jason Gipson**, Lion Sands Game Reserve
- **Kalie Otimile**, Tswalu Kalahari Reserve
- **Cameron Schmidt**, Pumba Private Game Reserve
- **Matthew Derry**, Kwandwe Private Game Reserve
- **Megan Heramb-Smith**, The Great Outdoors (Freelance)

Finalists were selected through a rigorous nomination and interview process, with eligibility requiring a minimum of five years' guiding experience, FGASA professional designations, and advanced qualifications. Over four days, each finalist was assessed across eight categories: Game Drive, Guided Bush Walk, Guided Photographic Safari, Bird Slide and Sound Test, Track and Sign, Advanced Rifle Handling, Storytelling, Hospitality and Professionalism.

Gipson impressed across the board, taking **first place in Guided Photographic Experience and Hosting**, and placing **runner-up in Game Drive, Bush Walk, and Track and Sign**. Judges praised his calm confidence, guest engagement, and leadership under pressure.

"The most rewarding part of guiding is being the link between guests and the natural world," says Gipson. "When someone sees a lion or elephant for the first time, it reminds you how lucky we are to do this work."

With over seven years of experience and training from Bhejane Nature Training, Gipson's achievement is both a personal triumph and a symbol of excellence in South African ecotourism. He now hopes to inspire and mentor the next generation of guides.

"If you work hard and put yourself out there, you never know what could happen," he added. "Be confident, stay humble, and never stop learning."

A Celebration of Field Guiding Excellence

FGASA Managing Director Michelle du Plessis emphasised the deeper mission of SGOTY: “Safari Guide of the Year is more than a competition — it’s a celebration of excellence, passion, and the vital role guides play in connecting people to nature. These professionals are the heartbeat of conservation and safari ecotourism. Through this event, we honour the skill, knowledge, and unwavering dedication and commitment that defines the standard of professional guiding in Africa.”

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Link to images:

[FGASA - SGOTYA Images](#)

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About FGASA

The Field Guides Association of Southern Africa (FGASA) is a non-profit organisation dedicated to promoting excellence in field guiding and wildlife tourism in Southern Africa. Established to enhance the quality and professionalism of guides, FGASA makes a significant contribution to shaping today’s nature guiding sector by establishing trusted professional standards, empowering skilled guides, and ensuring that guides are recognised as credible professionals within the tourism and conservation industries. Through its initiatives, FGASA supports the development of guides and the broader tourism industry, contributing to the professionalisation of the tourism sector.
