

Rhino is named South Africa's top newsmaker

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A dehorned black rhinoceros and a calf at the Bona Bona Game Reserve, southeast of Johannesburg. The rhino has been named South Africa's newsmaker for 2012, based on the extensive media coverage around the slaughter of the creature for its horn, the National Press Club said on Saturday.

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It is the first time that such recognition has gone to an animal, as

poaching figures reach all-time highs.

"Stories of rhino poaching dominated the headlines throughout the year, the story was covered extensively locally and internationally," said Antoinette Slabbert, chairperson of the National Press Club.

[Poachers](#) are increasingly targeting South Africa's rhinos, and last year killed a record 668 of them in parks across the country.

"We made this decision after a long and serious thought," Slabbert said, adding "there wasn't any other bigger story than this."

The plight of the pachyderm eclipsed the shooting of 34 mineworkers by police during a strike at Lonmin platinum mine in August, and a host of prominent [political news](#).

"People need to understand that we selected a newsmaker not a news event, the Marikana shooting was a [news event](#), with many faces," Slabbert said.

South Africa is home to about three-quarters of Africa's 20,000 or so [white rhinos](#) and 4,800 critically endangered black rhinos.

"While the rhino has dominated headlines for all the wrong reasons, the media has played a fundamental role in informing not only South Africans, but the world, about the massive tragedy that is unfolding in our country," Slabbert said.

Rhinos are victims of a surging demand for their horns, which some people in Asia think have medicinal properties. The claim is widely discredited.

South Africa and Vietnam last year signed a deal to tackle the trade and

several Asian nationals have been arrested for involvement in poaching.

The number of [rhinos](#) poached in the country rose sharply over the last five years, from 13 in 2007 to 448 in 2011.

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