

ON THE MAP IN USA

Sharkville documentary

Ryan Johnson - the scientist with the South African Marine Predators Lab (SAMPLA) in Mossel Bay whose National Geographic Channel documentary, 'Sharkville,' premiered in the USA last week - has just returned from New York City where he publicised both his film and the town in which he made it.

"Mossel Bay IS search here because and the extraordi- white sharks - seem Sharkville," he said. of its calm waters, nary way in which to co-exist here "We specifically the accessibility of man and sharks - chose to do our re- great white sharks and especially

● To page 2

Sharkville

Mossel Bay Advertiser, 2 August 2006

● From page 1

without intruding on each other's territory."

He said that he knew of one only fatal shark attack in the area - and that that occurred 17 years ago.

Indeed, the documentary - which will air in South Africa in a few week's time - shows just how close the two species come to one another territorially: yet both seem oblivious of one another.

"This particularly grabbed people's attention," he said.

Mr Johnson spent three days in New York, during which time he spoke to "about 35 radio stations in numerous states of the USA. I also did five live television interviews."

Radio interviews

Most of his radio interviews - each about five minutes in length and con-

ducted from the telephone in his hotel room - were broadcast on breakfast shows, while all but two of his television interviews went out on evening news programmes.

He said that he'd mentally prepared himself for America's most-watched interviewer, Bill O'Reilly - who's known for his aggressive and confrontational style and who attracts between 5 and 6 million viewers a day. But National Geographic's public relations team were delighted with Mr O'Reilly's reaction.

"As an avid scuba diver, he was genuinely interested in the animals and in the environment of Mossel Bay," said Mr Johnson, "as were Dianne Sawyer (co-anchor of ABC TV's Good Morning America) - who's been a legend in American

television for years - and Gretchen Carlson of Fox & Friends.

"You could see from their body language how much the subject interested them. Dianne was on the edge of her seat all the way through the interview."

Speaking on how his programme benefited South Africa's image in the USA, he said, "Man has dominated nature throughout human history but it came as a surprise to many of the people I spoke to that in Africa, where states have to be generally more interested in social rather than environmental issues, one country - South Africa - was taking this responsible approach to conservation."

Mossel Bay

"It was great to be able to go there and tell them about South Africa in

such a positive way."

Asked whether he'd mentioned Mossel Bay at all during his interviews, he reiterated his position that he couldn't have done the research he had if Mossel Bay didn't have the almost untouched environment that it does.

"So yes, everyone got to hear about this quaint holiday town on the Southern Cape coast of Africa" he said.

Although Mr Johnson hasn't yet received the final figures, he said that "Sharkville aired immediately after The Dog Whisperer - which is National Geographic's biggest programme. I don't know the exact ratings, but I do believe that on the night of its premier, Sharkville's figures were higher."

Repeat broadcasts of Sharkville will continue for five years - and National Geographic estimates that as many as 100 million people could watch it.

"So besides the millions of people who saw and heard me on TV and radio while I was in New York, there will be many millions more who'll be learning about Mossel Bay," said Mr Johnson.

"Nothing we could have done could have done more to increase awareness of Mossel Bay as a destination," said Debra Bouwer, Mossel Bay Tourism's marketing manager.

"The success of the show comes at the best possible time, too, because in March we'll be attending a conference of the American Society of

Travel Agents and talking to a thousand agents from the USA - and the fact that Sharkville highlights both the healthy state of our environment and the point that it really is safe to swim in Mossel Bay will genuinely help our cause.

"But over and above this, we're particularly proud that Ryan and his colleagues decided to set up their laboratory in our town.

"Mossel Bay Tourism congratulates him on his brilliant success with Sharkville - and we thank him for taking Mossel Bay along for the ride."

More information: SAMPLA - www.sampla.org; Mossel Bay Tourism - www.visitmossel-bay.co.za