



SHARK DIVE . . . Ryan Johnson, of Mossel Bay, measures a Zambezi shark with lasers.

Picture: www.fionaayerst.com

'Sharkville' documentary puts Mossel Bay on the map

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RYAN Johnson, a scientist with the SA Marine Predators Lab (Sampla) in Mossel Bay, whose National Geographic Channel documentary *Sharkville* premiered in the United States last week, has just returned from a promotion trip.

Johnson yesterday said he specifically chose Mossel Bay for his research because of its calm waters, the accessibility to great whites and the way in which the supreme predators and man lived in harmony in the town.

He said he knew of one fatal shark attack in the area 17 years ago.

The documentary, which airs in South Africa in a few weeks' time, shows how man and shark can co-exist in the same territory yet seem oblivious of each other.

"This particularly grabbed people's attention," Johnson said of his trip overseas. He spent three days in New York during which he spoke to "about 35 radio stations in numerous states of the USA".

"I also did five live television interviews," he added.

Johnson said he had mentally prepared himself for America's most-watched interviewer, Bill O'Reilly, who is known for his aggressive and confrontational style and who attracts between five and six million viewers a day.

"As an avid scuba diver he was genuinely interested in the animals and in the environment of Mossel Bay, as were Dianne Sawyer (co-anchor of ABC TV's *Good Morning America*) . . . and Gretchen Carlson of Fox & Friends," Johnson 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," he said.

"It was great to be able to go there and tell them about South Africa in such a positive way."

Although he has not yet received the final figures, Johnson said *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.

Mossel Bay Tourism marketing manager Debra Bouwer praised Johnson's efforts to increase awareness of the town through his work. "Nothing we could have done could have done more to increase awareness of Mossel Bay."