

# 'Anti-poaching units must to conserve wildlife'

■ Dutch national Martin Stierner shares experiences in Hwange National Park, Zimbabwe with forest officials and field staff

## ■ Staff Reporter

STRENGTHENING the vigilance through anti-poaching units is necessary to prevent animal loss, conservation of wildlife and environment, said Martin Stierner while delivering a presentation about his experience in setting up anti-poaching camps and foot patrolling in Hwange National Park, Zimbabwe, at Van Sabhagruh, Seminary Hills on Saturday evening.

Harshwardhan Dhanwatey, Member of Maharashtra State Board for Wildlife and Trustee of Tiger Research and Conservation Trust (TRACT) had invited Martin Stierner at Nagpur to visit the Central Indian Tiger Reserves and address the Forest Department officers and field staff of Forest Department.

In his presentation Martin Stierner put forth a case study of the area patrolled by his team in Reverine and Mope Woodlands of Hwange National Park, Zimbabwe, admeasuring about 80 sq kms.

Through his observations and research of nearly four years, he came to a conclusion that through



Martin Stierner sharing his experiences in setting up anti-poaching camps and foot patrolling in Hwange National Park, Zimbabwe.

a proper patrolling of an anti-poaching unit a direct animal loss about 54000 dollars to 67700 dollars per annum could be prevented. He gave various details about the secrets of success in anti-poaching. Support and proper backup of superiors, proper utilisation of materials like maps, technical equipments, etc., investing in training and education,

acceptation and co-operation with stake holders and trying to be resourceful are the essential requirements for an anti-poaching unit, he added.

Earlier, in his introductory remarks, Harshwardhan Dhanwatey said that he was invited by the Born Free Foundation to visit Zimbabwe and Ethiopia for 40 days to inter-

act with the wildlife conservationists and researchers working there. In Zimbabwe, he met Martin Stierner who was working on anti-poaching patrols to protect the wildlife in the Hwange National Park which is the largest wildlife national park in Zimbabwe, Dhanwatey added.

His interaction with Stierner helped him to learn about the methods of effective foot patrolling done to remove wire snares. With similarity in the problems regarding poaching in Zimbabwe and India, Harshwardhan thought this interaction with Stierner would enable TRACT and other NGOs working in India to assist the Forest Department in handling the poaching scenario here.

Martin Stierner is a Dutch national and has been working for Dutch Police. Initially he was working for the diplomatic department - protecting Ambassadors, Judges, since one and a half years he is working for Royal Department and guarding the Crown Prince of the Netherlands and his family. He started as an eco-volunteer in a Rhino project in Swaziland. In 1999 he

went again as an eco-volunteer to the Painted Dog Research Project in Zimbabwe.

In 2000 due to the dramatic change in situation in Zimbabwe the production of agricultural products plumed down and poaching of animals became a huge problem. Many animals were killed just for sport, fun and often wasted and this included the critically endangered Painted Hunting Dog (*Lycaon Pictus*).

Stierner proposed to the Painted Dog Conservation project that he would set up, train and deploy the first professional anti-poaching unit in the Hwange National Park area.

The first unit came into existence in 2001 followed by second in 2003. As for the last three years Martin Stierner has been training and coordinating these unit members for about three months per year. Since, Martin established the anti-poaching camps near Hwange National Park, the incidence of snaring and poaching has come very much under control.

Poonam Dhanwatey conducted the proceedings and proposed a vote of thanks.