

## HUNTER CANCELS LION HUNT AFTER PROTESTS

**JOHANNESBURG:** A professional hunter in Zimbabwe has canceled a plan to raffle a lion hunt at a hunters' convention in the United States, following protests from activists. Martin Nel said he is scrapping the raffle in which he hoped to sell 100 raffle tickets for \$1,500 each in Las Vegas next month. LionAid, a group based in Britain, had expressed shock at the proposal, which focused attention on the heated debate about whether hunting hurts already vulnerable species, or can help them by raising funds for conservation.

In a statement this month, Nel said the raffle winner could also have chosen to have a lion collared for research, and that the project was designed to raise funds for conservation studies at Zimbabwe's Buby Valley Conservancy.

The conservancy defended its record, saying cattle ranchers had wiped out lions, rhinos, elephants and other wildlife in the area decades ago. Established in 1994, the conservancy reintroduced lions in 1999 and today has a population of nearly 500 as well as a significant number of endangered black rhinos, it said. WildCRU, a wildlife research group based at Oxford University in Britain, operates at Buby. It said it did not endorse any proposal to auction a lion hunt and would not accept any donation from such an event.

Last year, an American killed a well-known lion named Cecil in Zimbabwe in an allegedly illegal hunt, causing an international outcry. The number of wild lions in Africa has been dwindling for many years. In his statement, Nel said there were more lions in Zimbabwe's hunting areas than in the country's national parks. Without well-managed hunting operations, he said, "many hunting areas would go back to goats and cattle at the expense of the wildlife and their habitat - how can that be considered a win for conservation?" —AP



**LOGAN:** This Dec 29, 2015 photo provided by the Logan, Utah, Police Department shows baby formula seized as evidence in a police department storage room. —AP

## SCRAPE GROUND MARKS LINKED TO DINOSAURS

**NEW YORK:** Scientists say they've discovered evidence of a frenzied mating ritual by dinosaurs: Long grooves in the ground etched by the pawing of clawed feet. Such behavior is seen nowadays in some birds, and the discovery suggests that two-legged, meat-eating dinosaurs called theropods did it about 100 million years ago, the researchers said.

Martin Lockley of the University of Colorado Denver said the dinosaurs, probably males, apparently gathered in groups and "went crazy scraping" with their clawed, three-toed feet to attract mates. The beasts were built roughly like smaller versions of a T Rex. Footprints near the grooves suggest a variety of body lengths, up to about 16 feet from snout to tip of the tail. The grooves they carved are up to 6 feet long.

The ritual would have been entertaining to watch, Lockley said in an interview. "These animals would have been really frenzied." Lockley, an emeritus professor of geology, is an author of a paper on the discovery released Thursday by the journal Scientific Reports. The grooves were found at three sites in western Colorado and another just west of Denver.

Dinosaur expert Thomas Holtz Jr. of the University of Maryland, who didn't participate in the work, said it's reasonable to think that theropods created the grooves. But was it for mating? Holtz said he wasn't convinced that the new paper had sufficiently ruled out other explanations. But he added that there's no particular evidence for rejecting the mating idea.

"Whatever behavior is being recorded here, it is an expression of the fact that dinosaurs like all animals did more than hunt and attack and devour and fight and all that limited set of behaviors that popular culture often portrays," Holtz wrote in an email. —AP

# BIG-DOLLAR BABY FORMULA THEFTS DOG STORES, POLICE ACROSS US

**SALT LAKE CITY:** The recent arrests in Utah of three people accused of stealing thousands of dollars' worth of baby formula is the latest example of a problem that officials say is vexing stores and police nationwide as thieves systematically swipe the mixture from shelves and resell it to unsuspecting parents.

Baby formula is a major expense for many new parents, with small canisters starting around \$20 and special or prescription blends costing two or three times that. It's also widely used. More than a third of infants receive formula in addition to breast milk in their first six months, the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates. Often, babies who are weaned off breast milk will continue to drink formula into their toddler years. The high price and broad demand make it an enticing target for thieves, who typically sell the stolen formula at flea markets or list it on websites like Craigslist and eBay. In late December, police in Logan, about 80 miles north of Salt Lake City, confiscated 422 cans of stolen formula worth \$8,000 to \$10,000. It came from stores in Logan and three other northern Utah cities, and officers are looking for ties to similar recent thefts in Idaho cities about 150 miles away, Police Capt. Curtis Hooley said.

### Multiple stores

In Pleasanton, California, thefts of large amounts of formula are reported at least once a month, with thieves fre-

quently hitting multiple stores around the San Francisco Bay Area, according to police Lt Kurt Schlehuber. He doesn't think the culprits are parents trying to feed their kids. "There are people that are making money off of selling the stuff," Schlehuber said. In April, Pleasanton police arrested two people suspected of stealing dozens of containers of the product. Officers happened to see the pair running from the store with shopping baskets full of formula. But arrests can be rare when police often have only an anonymous face captured by a surveillance camera, Schlehuber said.

Around the country, law enforcement agencies in recent years have reported heists ranging from thousands to several million dollars' worth of baby formula. In 2009, Florida authorities arrested 21 people accused in an elaborate theft ring that officials say pilfered more than \$2 million in formula annually.

Investigators working on that sting-called "Operation Hot Milk" - said thieves were paid between \$100 and \$300 a day and used multiple lookouts while filling bags with formula. They hit 15 or more stores a day and later repackaged the formula and sold it in other states, authorities said. The Infant Nutrition Council of America, an association of baby formula manufacturers, does not keep statistics on the thefts but said it's a continuing problem nationwide.

"We're not talking about petty

shoplifting," said Jennifer Hatcher, a senior vice president for government and public affairs at the Food Marketing Institute, which represents supermarket chains, small grocery stores, pharmacies and other food retailers. Large thefts can be a particularly costly problem for many such stores, which are required to keep a minimum amount of formula on their shelves to accept customers spending money dispersed through the federal Women, Infants and Children nutrition program, known as WIC. Hatcher said the industry has been working to combat the thefts for about 15 years.

### Safety concern

For parents, stolen formula can be a safety concern. They can't be sure that what they're buying has been stored at proper temperatures or isn't past its expiration date. Some sophisticated theft rings even print counterfeit formula labels to make a cow's-milk-based product appear to be a more expensive soy or rice formula designed for children with milk allergies, Hatcher said.

Mardi Mountford, the nutrition council's executive director, recommends that formula be bought only from a trustworthy retailer, either in-store or online. New mother Erica Otten of Tabernacle, New Jersey, said she understands a parent's temptation to try and save on the expensive product by shopping for a discounted

version online.

Her 5-month-old daughter has a protein allergy requiring a specific formula that costs \$32 for a 1-pound can that lasts four days at most. Still, Otten sticks to the major retailers. "It sounds scary because you're feeding it to your infant," she said. "I inspect everything like crazy - the expiration date, the fact that it's sealed." To help with the cost, Otten signed up to receive regular coupons from formula manufacturers while pregnant. She now swaps the coupons she doesn't need with other mothers around the country.

Some retailers take extra steps to combat thefts, keeping their baby formula under lock and key. Others stamp their store names and locations on containers to alert consumers or police if the stolen product turns up for sale somewhere else, Hatcher said. When large amounts of formula are stolen, lot numbers are provided to websites like eBay that can monitor sale listings for the products.

To chip away at the black market demand, federal officials have started requiring grocery stores and retailers that participate in the WIC program to buy formula only from approved wholesalers. "Each one of these tactics, it seems to have helped alleviate some of the ability for them to resell this product quickly," Hatcher said. "That doesn't mean it's still not an incredibly attractive product to try to steal." —AP

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