Smithsonian Institution

New

Media only: Beth King (703) 487-3770, ext. 8216 or kingb@si.edu
Monica Alvarado (703) 487-3770, ext. 8023 or alvaradom@si.edu

Jan. 30, 2009

Media Web site: www.stri.org

Smithsonian Scientists Receive Coveted BBVA Ecology and Conservation Award

Outstanding leaders in tropical biology and conservation, William F. Laurance, senior staff scientist at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute and Thomas E. Lovejoy, research associate at the Institute and Biodiversity Chair at the H. John Heinz III Center for Science, Economics and the Environment, have won the coveted 2008 BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Award in Ecology and Conservation Biology, announced on 30 Jan. 2009 in Madrid, Spain.

The pair received the award for their contributions toward understanding the consequences of habitat fragmentation and the impacts of global change on tropical forests, and for the development of fundamental political strategies to stem the tide of tropical deforestation.

"Laurance and Lovejoy, a dynamic scientific team, promote conservation research in imperiled tropical forests in the Amazon and worldwide, catalyzing the efforts of countless others to achieve conservation goals," said Cristián Samper, director of the Smithsonian´s National Museum of Natural History, who nominated them. "Their clear communication of research priorities and findings inspires decision-makers and the broader public to establish and conserve the large, interconnected forest reserves vital to life-supporting ecological processes at both local and global scales."

Nearly three decades ago, Lovejoy convinced the Brazilian government to support the establishment of the Biological Dynamics of Forest Fragments Project (BDFFP) in central Amazonia. Today, the project, managed by the Smithsonian and Brazil's National Institute of Amazon Research, INPA, continues to supply direct scientific evidence that small patches of forest do not sustain the same diversity of plants and animals as do larger patches and to elucidate the processes leading to the demise of fragmented forests.

Laurance and Lovejoy also work tirelessly to promote training of Amazonian students and conservation professionals, and are actively engaged in ongoing conservation efforts in the region. In 2001 Laurance led an effort to project the future condition of forests in Brazilian Amazonia, which led to widespread international alarm about planned road-building projects for the region.

"Our work would not have been possible without close collaboration with scientists and government officials in Brazil, across Latin America and in other countries," said Lovejoy.

The project and affiliated researchers, students, and visiting scientists have produced over 520 technical and popular publications—many of which were authored or co-authored by Laurance and Lovejoy—as well as 55 doctoral dissertations, and 63 master´s theses. Among these are more than twenty articles published in the leading journals Science and Nature, and eight major edited books, including such seminal works as Tropical Forest Remnants by William Laurance and Richard Bierregaard, Lessons from Amazonia by Richard Bierregaard, Thomas Lovejoy, and others, Climate Change and Biodiversity by Thomas Lovejoy and Lee Hannah, and Emerging Threats to Tropical Forests by William Laurance and Carlos Peres.

Finally, Lovejoy and Laurance have initiated and promoted some of the most important and creative conservation initiatives in Amazonia and elsewhere in the tropics, such as debt-for-nature swaps, which have become models for tropical forest management and international conservation programs across the planet.

The Ecology and Conservation Biology Award is one of eight awards granted by the BBVA Foundation each year. The size of the cash awards, totaling 3.2 million Euros, and the range of disciplines in the arts and sciences they represent, place the BBVA prizes in the same category as the Nobel prizes.

STRI, headquartered in Panama City, Panama, is a unit of the Smithsonian Institution. The institute furthers the understanding of tropical nature and its importance to human welfare, trains students to conduct research in the tropics and promotes conservation by increasing public awareness of the beauty and importance of tropical ecosystems. Web site: www.stri.org.

# # #