



K O N I N K L I J K E N E D E R L A N D S E
A K A D E M I E V A N W E T E N S C H A P P E N

The Dr A.H. Heineken Prize for Environmental Sciences awarded to William Laurance

Ladies and gentlemen,

While you were watching that movie about Bill Laurance, an area of tropical rainforest twice the size of Amsterdam disappeared from the face of the earth. This year alone, an area greater than The Netherlands will be cut to make way for agricultural lands.

Many people in tropical countries escape poverty thanks to this kind of development, just like people in Europe did many decades ago. However, the demise of tropical rainforests is a price that neither of us can afford.

Tropical rainforests hold by far most of our planet's biodiversity; they help stabilize our climate and atmosphere; and they contain many other resources we have not even begun to discover.

Bill Laurance is passionate about the fight to save tropical rainforests. Vigorous research, very hard work, and telling people about it are his powerful weapons.

As a boy, growing up on an American ranch, young Billy just adored animals. He kept baby bears and mountain lions and dreamt about having a zoo.

As a student, however, he learnt that natural ecosystems are better than zoos. He has been travelling the world ever since, doing research in Australia, Asia, Africa and the Americas.

Bill Laurance has published numerous papers on all sorts of subjects, such as forest fragmentation, infectious diseases, road building, logging, fires, hunting, soil, corruption, and climate change. To reach his conclusions, he studied all sorts of species: frogs, sea turtles and, yes, even humans. He didn't swim with crocodiles yet, but that seems only a matter of time.

Through his research, Bill Laurance learned that threats may seem small if seen in isolation but that together they can bring down tropical forests. He manages large-scale efforts to take stock of biodiversity in forests across multiple continents. He has greatly increased public awareness about the need for conservation, and he has stood up against economical threats.

Through it all, his mission has remained clear: find ways to preserve biodiversity.

Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in honouring William Laurance, winner of the 2012 Heineken Prize for Environmental Sciences.