## BSU alum travels the globe to study tropical rainforests

or Boise State graduate Bill Laurance, tripping over a king cobra during a research expedition in Africa's Congo Basin and then getting chased by a herd of forest elephants is all part of a day's work.

"I was amazed how fasttheelephantscharged us," says Laurance, a senior scientist with the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, based in Panama. "It was very loud and very sudden. We scattered and ran as fast as we could."

Laurance (BS, biology, '82), leading world expert on the effects of fragmen-

tation of tropical systems, is president of the Association for Tropical Biology and a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. His studies have taken him to Brazil's



Amazon Basin, central Africa, northern Queensland in Australia and other exotic parts of the globe.

Laurance (left, in Central Africa) has published more than 200 articles in scientific journals, provided expert testimony at international hearings, and written several books, including the memoir Stinging Trees and Wait-a-Whiles: Confessions of a Rainforest Biologist ("Biology grad pens rainforest epic," FOCUS, Winter 2001).

While the size of the world's rainforests sounds impressive — the Amazon rainforest is about two-thirds the size of the continental United States — deforestation is occurring at an alarming rate, Laurance says. And that has serious repercussions for everything from global warming to extinction of species to discovering new drugs to treat disease.

"The rainforest has had millions of years to develop biological compounds," he says. "Ninety-nine percent of plants haven't been explored yet for pharmaceutical benefits."

Pressures to develop rainforest lands are both huge and complex, and it will take the support of many nations to effectively address the issues, Laurance believes. "The world isn't as big as we once thought; our systems are all connected," he says.

— Janelle Brown

