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Award links Devon fly-fishing with one of the world's top hotels

The subject of cleaning up river catchments has won a young Devon conservationist a prestigious new award, as **Martin Hesp** reports

What could mucky Westcountry river water full of cattle droppings possibly have to do with a famous up-market Devon fishing establishment, the elegance of the Ritz Hotel and even the late Ernest Hemingway?

You'd think that no story could possibly contain such a series of unlikely links, and yet there are direct connections between all of the above and they have come to light thanks to an award that has just been bestowed on a Devon student.

The award, set up by Salmon and Trout Conservation UK and the Arundell Arms Hotel in the memory of the late Anne Voss-Bark, was this weekend presented to Robin Knight, from Winkleigh.

Robin is an up-and-coming star in river conservation circles and it was his work on livestock poaching on water courses in the Torridge catchment that won him the award – which is part sponsored by the International Fario Club.

It was founded in 1958 by Charles César Ritz (who at the time was president of the Ritz Hotel Group) and is described as the “most select fishing club in the world”.

Ritz was a friend of writer Ernest Hemingway who called him “one of the finest fly fisherman I know” and his club was formed to gather anglers “who share a love of rivers in pursuit of fish, together with eco-responsibility”.

ibility”.

Here in the UK, the main aim of the Anne Voss-Bark Award is to give the winning candidate work experience and an opportunity of pursuing a career in river management and conservation.

Of this year's winning candidate, Dr Janina Gray, head of science and policy with Salmon and Trout Conservation UK, said: “We were hugely

impressed with Robin's passion for his subject. His love of fishing, as well as other country activities, including walking and wildlife spotting, laid the foundations for him to go to university and study a Bachelor of Science degree in Environmental Management and Geography.

“His literature review on livestock poaching on water courses in the Torridge catchment illustrates many of the modern problems that we face nationally with our precious rivers and streams. It was very impressive and we consider that he was a very worthy winner of this award.”

Robin said: “I am passionate about making our natural world better and have focused my educational achievements on the aquatic environment.

“I intend to continue to pursue my career in this important and sometimes much neglected sector, where there are many gaps in our know-

ledge, which need addressing.

“My award provides the springboard to the next stage of my career and I am looking forward to gaining more practical ‘hands-on’ experience, learning more about river and catchment management from leading experts so that I can concentrate my energies into establishing a full-time career in this sector.”

The award was presented to Robin at the Arundell Arms in Lifton by

Anne Voss-Bark's son, Adam Fox-Edwards, who now runs the hotel.

Anne Voss-Bark turned the establishment into an eminent fishing and country sports hotel, which she ran for over half a century.

She was awarded the MBE in 1996 at the age of 84 for her conservation achievements.

Anne was married to Conrad Voss Bark, former parliamentary correspondent for the BBC and she jointly founded the West Country Rivers Trust with her friend, poet Ted Hughes.

A spokesman for the charity said: “Anne was a dedicated conservationist and her love of fly-fishing made her aware of changes in the countryside that were detrimental to our rivers and fish.

“She was, for instance, among the first to recognise the damage being done by agricultural fertilisers leach-



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ing from soil into local river catchments.”

The award includes one week at the Arundell Arms learning hands-on fisheries management and fly-fishing from the experienced river managers

and gillies, as well as one week with the West Country Rivers Trust, learning catchment management and water science from the organisation’s eminent scientists.

The prize also includes expenses of up to £500 donated by Salmon and Trout Conservation UK and the International Fario Club of Paris.

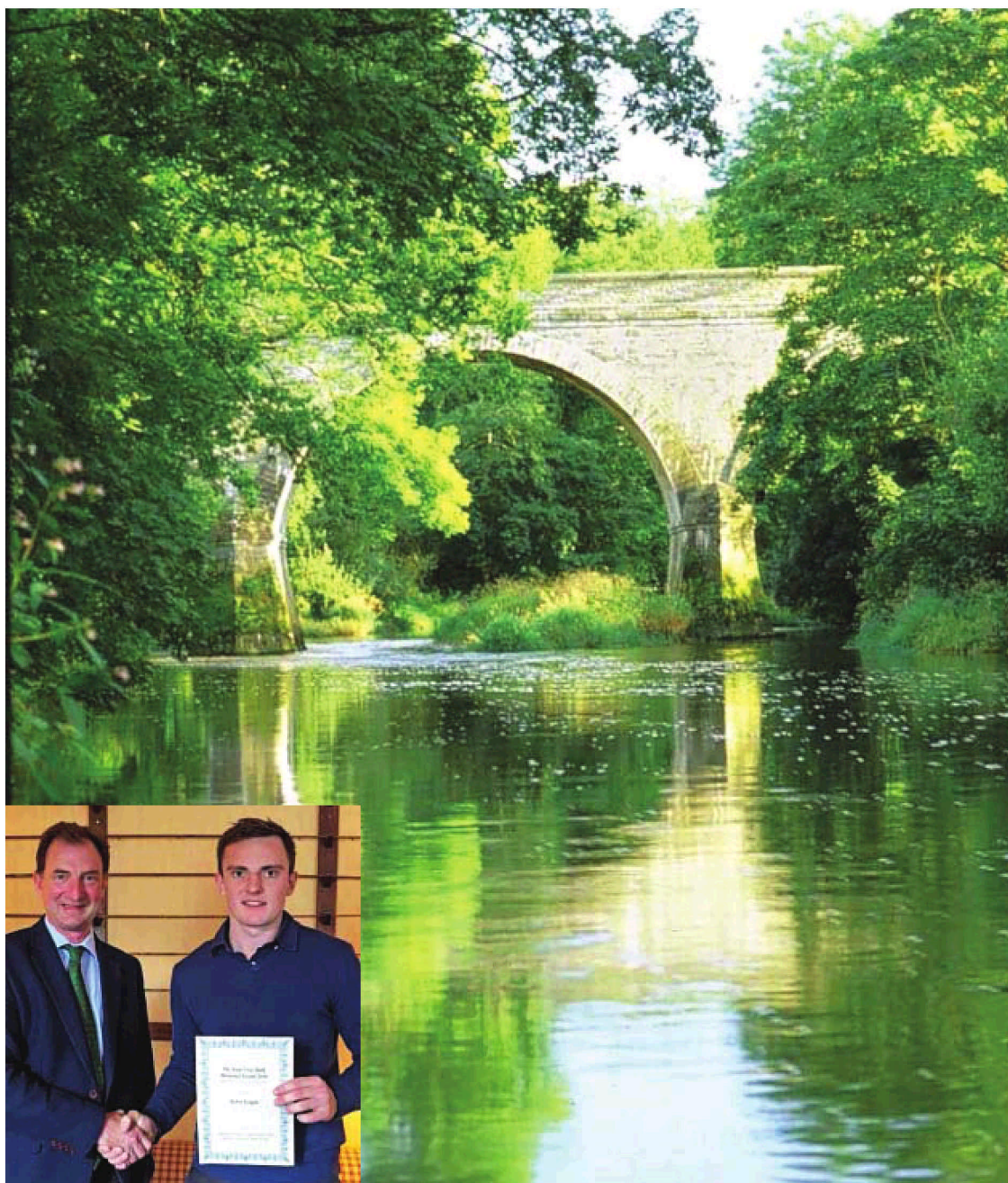
Which goes to show that even the most tenuous links of a story can come together, like the muddy strands of multitudinous streams gathering to become one big fish-filled river.

“I am passionate about making our natural world better...”

Robin Knight, award winner



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Robin Knight receives his award for his work on livestock poaching on water courses in the River Torridge catchment