

Closer to spiders than ever before

A WILDLIFE park full of some of the largest spiders in the world may not seem like the best place for a group of arachnophobics.

But led by hypnotherapist Pippa Shay, four phobics — including me — visited the Cotswold Wildlife Park, near Burford, to overcome our fears.

The three-hour course — entitled *Feeling Calm with Spiders* — was the first of its

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kind to be held in the park. Including lunch and a look around the park, the session cost £85, during which three therapies — hypnotherapy, neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), and emotional freedom technique — were used.

And by the end of the day, all four had come closer to spiders than we had ever

dared before, including touching a tarantula, named Fluffy.

Participant Karen Rayner, 43, of Bampton, said: "I would never have thought that at the end of the day I would be able to touch a tarantula. I was surprised at how quickly I got the result."

Ms Shay — who usually works from the Beanbag Natural Health Store, in Witney, and Bampton Physiotherapy and Associates — said about her methods: "It's giving people the skills to run their lives better."

"It helps people be all they want to be in whatever way, reaching their potential and sorting out things that have been holding them back."

It started in the brightly-lit drawing room of the park's manor house.

Accompanied by gentle music, we sat on seats in a circle, closed our eyes, and concentrated on our breathing.

While we were deeply relaxed, Ms Shay introduced NLP.

Described by the 43-year-old therapist as a "user's manual for the brain", the



Pippa Shay, who ran the course

Pictures: Damian Halliwell

idea is to look at past events and see them in a different light.

We were asked to think of three incidents when we were most afraid of spiders, and then to rewind this image.

Instead we imagined the spider wearing pink wellies and a red nose, accompanied by comical music.

Ms Shay, of Bampton, explained: "People use all of their senses, and having calm music helps to create a calm atmosphere, like playing the Benny Hill-theme tune for when we are remembering a memory, but remembering it differently."

The final method was emotional freedom technique.

This is described as emotional acupuncture, as it uses 14 of the acupuncture points. We were told to tap these areas — from the head to underneath the eye to beneath our fingers — while repeating what we had learnt. That our fear would no longer rule our lives.

James Reynolds, reptile keeper at the park, was on hand to answer questions about spiders.

He also introduced us to tarantula Fluffy, along with some of its smaller friends.

Ms Shay, a therapist for the past five years, has used the same techniques to cure herself of a phobia of flying.

Following the 9/11 attacks in the US, Ms Shay avoided travelling by aeroplane to the point that she would only go

on holiday if she could reach the destination by boat or car.

She said: "I hypnotised myself, and got myself into a really relaxed stage and played movies in my head to make flying all go fine."

She explained how phobias are created: "It will come from learned behaviour or from a highly emotionally-charged incidents. Our primitive part of the brain records all of the details of it as highly important, so that it can remember what it feels like or looks like. It's there to protect us — it's like a faulty new

alarm that's set too high, so that just a leaf falling will set it off."

The session at the Cotswold Wildlife Park followed in the footsteps of similar courses at London and Bristol zoos.

Ms Shay said: "It is a perfect opportunity being in such a beautiful place, and it means that there are the spiders. People can then go as close as they want to."

For more information, visit Beautiful-Spaces.co.uk, or call Ms Shay on 01993 852297 or 07733 225316.



Karen Rayner, of Bampton, takes a close look



Reptile keeper James Reynolds introduces Fluffy to, left to right, Karen Rayner, of Bampton, Gazette reporter Jennifer Rivett, and Pauline McTimoney, of Farmoor



Jennifer and her new friend

An article from The Witney Gazette about the Beautiful Spaces Spiderphobia day at the Cotswold Wildlife Park.