

## **My Impressions of the Fall 2009 Master Naturalist Course**

Last fall was the first time in several years that the Indiana Master Naturalist Course was given in Terre Haute. At the end of August I learned from an article published in the *Terre Haute Tribune-Star* that the course was to be given at Ivy Tech Community College once a week, beginning on September 10 and continuing for seven more weeks. I was already aware of the Master Gardener program in the state but at the time I had not known the Master Naturalist course also existed. Being a long-time nature lover who enjoys walking in the park and taking photos of flowers and insects in our garden, I immediately decided to sign up.

Most of the course's class sessions were given in a classroom at Ivy Tech's Workforce Development Center, which is fortunately not far from my home in southern Vigo County, but several were given in other locations, such as Fowler Park and the Nature Center at Dobbs Park. The different locations added variety to what was already an interesting course, even apart from the 24 hours of volunteer work required for Master Naturalist certification after the class work. The course was given by Purdue Extension Educator Jim Luzar, but except for the October 22 session (Ecology, Agriculture, and Sustainability) various guest lecturers did the actual teaching. Those teachers came from a wide variety of backgrounds, from the state Natural Resources department, the county and city parks department, and even from the state university system.

Many of those guest instructors brought in materials that made their subject matter even more absorbing. For example, Karen Staub, a local gardener and wild plant expert who gave the first lecture of the course on September 10, handed around examples of native plants and also showed specimens of invasive non-native species. Purdue naturalist Brian McGowan, the instructor during the October 15 session on Indiana mammals, had on hand a number of skull specimens from many of those animals, from tiny shrews and voles to full grown deer, foxes, and coyotes.

The September 24 session on bats, reptiles and amphibians, given at Dobbs Park by park naturalist Carissa Lovett, also featured a number of specimens, but the most interesting was a live little brown bat Lovett brought out at the session's end. I wanted to take a picture of the bat, but unfortunately didn't have my regular camera with me. I did take some pictures of the bat with the camera on my cell phone, but all I was able to get, due to the rather poor lighting in the room, were several blurry photos showing a vaguely bat-shaped creature nestling in Lovett's gloved hand—better than nothing, I consoled myself. Another mild disappointment occurred during the October 8 session on forestry, given by Keith Ruble at Fowler Park, when heavy rain kept us from going outdoors to study tree species in the park. Even so, the class still proved very interesting, with a lot of useful information about managing small woodlots, controlling invasive species, and related topics. The session ended with an extra—an impromptu bluegill-filleting session by Ruble after the lecture was over. I learned many other things during class meetings that I don't have the space to go into here, about topics such as wetlands management, soil conservation, and the geology of Indiana.

All in all, I found the Master Naturalist course very worthwhile.