

# MAHARASHTRA'S EPHEMERALS: PLANTS THAT WAIT FOR MONSOON TO BLOOM

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*Corynandra elegans* species is seen in the Konkan region of Maharashtra. This monsoon flora was clicked near Rajapur. | Photo Credit: Special Arrangement

Blooming is often associated with the spring season. Yet, only a few know that in parts of Maharashtra, certain plant species wait throughout the year to bloom only during the monsoon because they love rain.

Such plants are termed ephemerals. They are of two types — annual and perennial, explain researchers from the International Union for Conservation of Nature - Species Survival Commission (IUCN SSC). Aditya Gadkari, member and researcher at IUCN SSC, Western Ghats Plant Specialist Group (WGPSG), says, "Annual ephemerals form new individuals every year and are seen for a very short period. They form seeds at the end of their life cycle, remaining dormant till the next year. Perennials have a source like a tuber or a bulb in the soil, so it is the same individual, but the other parts (stem, flowers) are newly formed."

*Curcuma karnatakensis*, clicked near Yellapur, is found in the forest regions of West Ghats. The word *ensis* suggests belonging to Karnataka. | Photo Credit: Special Arrangement

The IUCN SSC WGPSG does not work only on monsoon flora; its primary work involves making threat assessments of all species distributed in the Western Ghats.

Monsoon ephemerals bloom towards the end of May and throughout June, July, August, and September. "Some other monsoon ephemerals will just form leaves and little branch structures after a few showers. These leaves stay for a month or more and then flowering starts, which goes on till July and August. The leaves stay till the end of monsoon and then disappear. In some plants, like *Nervilia* and wild yam, flowers appear first and then the leaves," says Mr. Gadkari.

*Ceropegia sahyadrica* var. *karulensis*, clicked in Gaganbawda. This monsoon flora is found in the Karul Ghats of Maharashtra. The name *karulensis* means belonging to Karul, a village after which the Ghat is named. | Photo Credit: Special Arrangement

The onset of monsoon brings flowers such as ground orchids (*Nervilia* and *Eulophia*), lilies (crinum lily, pancratium lily, grass lily, star lily), wild yam (suran), and Indian squill. The late

monsoon brings flowers such as ground orchids (*Habenaria* and *Peristylus*), several types of balsams, hill meadow rue, *Dipcadi* species, spider-flowers (*Corynandra*), pond-weeds (*Aponogeton*), lantern flowers (*Ceropegia*), bladderworts (*Utricularia*), pipeworts (*Eriocaulon*), and species of grasses.

*Ceropegia mohanramii* is found on a single low elevation coastal plateau near Malvan, Maharashtra. | Photo Credit: Special Arrangement

The primary job of these flowers is to act as an important source of nectar and pollen for native pollinators. Their presence in all micro habitats on a plateau ensures the appropriate presence of soil and, most importantly, water. Quite a few of them are threatened due to land use change, and expansion of roadways and infrastructure.

Environmental and educational organisations have been carrying out flora walks over the last few years. Anurag Karekar, project director of Naturalist Foundation and founder of Naturalist Explorers, says walks are organised to see the mass flowering of the crinum lily on the hilly slopes and plateaus of Bhatpada hills in Virar, upper Kanheri, and Gaimukh treks of the Sanjay Gandhi National Park. Trekkers also spot unique flowers like kali musli and squill in the Yeoor Hills of Thane.

*Dipcadi concanense* is found only on the plateaus of Konkan region. It was clicked near Ratnagiri. | Photo Credit: Special Arrangement

Two years ago, Priyal Soni saw Instagram posts on monsoon flora and since then has been part of such trails. “When I learnt that the Naturalist Foundation was taking people to see the crinum lily in the dense forest of Bombay Natural History Society’s Conservation Education Centre, I joined it. We were amazed to see the trumpet-shaped petals shimmering with raindrops. It felt like learning about a beautiful secret of the forest.”

Prathamesh Desai has been observing birds for 13 years. Though flowers have sparked his interest, he found the technicality of flora overwhelming. “One of my flora enthusiast friends ignited my interest in the world of flowers. I am now interested in the habitat and niche preferences of particular species. Finding a particular species is like a treasure hunt, which I find exciting,” he says.

*Eulophia spectabilis* is seen in India, South East Asia and even Australia. This bloom was clicked in Lonavala. | Photo Credit: Special Arrangement

*Impatiens dalzellii* is the only yellow coloured Balsam in Western Ghats, otherwise yellow Balsams in India are found in Himalayas. This monsoon bloom was clicked at Mahabaleshwar. | Photo Credit: Special Arrangement

Photographed near Ratnagiri, *Utricularias* are seen on both low and high elevation plateaus of Western Ghats all the way from Maharashtra to Kerala. | Photo Credit: Special Arrangement

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