

Madera Canyon Species Spotlight:

Common Monkeyflower

In May, returning seasonal heat reigns over southern Arizona. Though cooler up in Madera Canyon, the heat wave bakes the last of the spring wildflowers and grasses on exposed slopes to a crispy golden brown. The riparian corridor of Madera Creek provides welcome green relief, with cooling shade under towering trees, verdant banks and a smattering of wildflowers to tide hardy nature lovers over until the monsoon rains.

At this dry time of year, canyon flowers seem rather few and far between. Higher up, elegant Golden Columbine show brightly along drainages and the scattered little yellow daisies like New Mexico Butterweed and Pringles Hawkweed dot trail edges. Close observation along creek beds reveals another canyon treasure, Common Monkeyflower, *Erythranthe guttata*, common only in abundance and truly a real gem easily overlooked!

For a wildflower enthusiast this botanical name may not be familiar. In recent times, many plants, and plant families, have undergone scientific revision. This scrutiny has resulted in placement of many species in new families and copious genus/species name changes. For many of us “old timers”, Common Monkeyflower was known as *Mimulus guttatus*, a member of the Snapdragon family, Scrophulariaceae. The botanical name has not only been revised; the plant is now placed in the Lopseed family, Phrymaceae.

Common Monkeyflower is usually perennial and grows from 500' to 9,500'. It is an abundant riparian plant along flowing portions of the Santa Cruz River near Green Valley. In Madera Canyon, Common Monkeyflower grows in and along Madera Creek, creek tributaries and wet places from well below Proctor high up into the Santa Ritas. Wherever there is a place to “keep its feet wet” in the canyon, there is a good chance you'll find it!

Common Monkeyflower grows up to 3' tall, but is generally smaller. The dark green leaves are nearly succulent, up to 4" long and oval-shaped with toothed margins; they make tasty salad greens. The showy, tubular yellow flowers are snapdragon-like in form, with a two-lobed upper lip pointing upwards and a three-lobbed lower lip drooping downwards concealing a hairy throat in between. Blooms may be up to 1½" long and 1¼" wide, though often smaller during drier times. The lobbed lower lip is freckled with conspicuous reddish-pink spots. These spots are nectar guides, which entice and direct pollinators to part the flexible lips and enter the flower for pollen and nectar. The primary pollinators appear to be bees and flies. Dusted with pollen as they squeeze into a flower, the flying insects then carry the pollen on to other blossoms.

Common Monkeyflower blooms primarily from March through September. Some of the best places to see the plant are to look up and down stream from the Madera Creek bridges between Proctor and White House. It grows in and along the streambed. Look for the bright yellow blooms scattered on deep green foliage. Though not as large as the

conspicuous blossoms of Golden Columbine or Hooker's Primrose, the exquisite flowers of Common Monkeyflower are well worth a closer look!

