

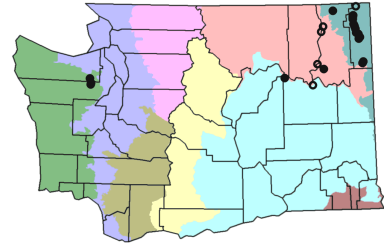
Astragalus microcystis A. Gray

least bladdery milk-vetch

Fabaceae - pea family

status: State Sensitive, BLM sensitive, USFS sensitive

rank: G5 / S2



General Description: Taprooted perennial with many stems arising from an exposed root crown, spreading along the ground or ascending, 1-5 dm long. Leaves 3-6 cm long, grayish green and hairy, pinnate; leaflets 9-15, linear-elliptic to oblanceolate, 5-15 mm long. Stipules 3-5 mm long, the lowest fully surrounding the stem and fused over 1/2 their length, the upper ones longer and narrower, shortly fused or not fused.

Floral Characteristics: Racemes 5-12 flowers; flowers 6-8 (9) mm long, pink or pale lavender to deep purplish magenta, banner notched at the apex and less than 8.3 mm long, keel 3.7-4.8 mm long. Calyx up to 1/2 the length of the corolla, with small grayish to blackish hairs and linear-lanceolate teeth about equal in length to the tube.

Fruits: Pods sessile, usually with appressed hairs, 8-12 mm long, inflated, papery, ellipsoid-obovoid, slightly compressed, 1-celled. Identifiable late April to August.

Identification Tips: Most easily identified with mature fruits. In the Olympic Mts. possibly confused with *Astragalus australis* var. *olympicus*, which has a stalked pod 2.5 cm long. *A. lentiginosus* var. *lentiginosus* also has a longer pod (1-4 cm). In northeastern WA, *A. canadensis* var. *mortonii* is much taller (3-8 dm) and has 2-celled fruits, and *A. alpinus* var. *alpinus* has a longer keel (greater than 6 mm).

Range: Eastern Olympic Mts., northeast WA, southern B.C., northern ID, western MT, and WY.

Habitat/Ecology: In the Olympic Mts. on dry gravelly soils in cushion plant communities of the alpine and subalpine zones; strongly correlated with limestone. Associated species include silky phacelia (*Phacelia sericea*), alpine candytuft (*Smelowskia calycina*), and cutleaf daisy (*Erigeron compositus*). In eastern WA it grows at low elevations in gravelly to sandy areas, on riverbanks, and in open woods. Elevations throughout WA: 350-2000 m (1200-6300 ft). Plants from lower elevations have longer stems, wider leaflets, more numerous flowers, and larger pods than those in the mountains.

Comments: Disjunct in the Olympic Mts., where introduced mountain goats and associated erosion are threats. This species is also rare in B.C. and possibly extirpated from ID.

References: Barneby 1964; Buckingham et al. 1995.

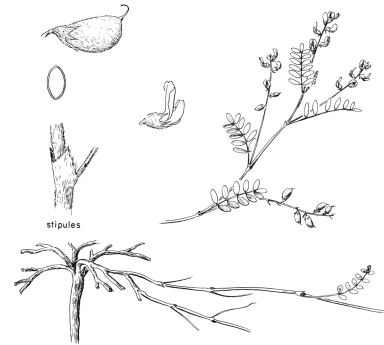


Illustration by Jeanne R. Janish,
©1961 University of Washington
Press



© Rod Gilbert

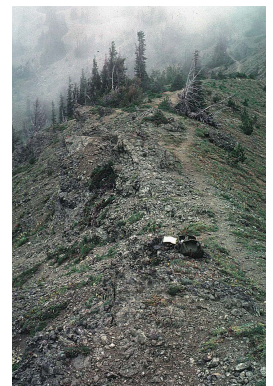


photo by Mark Sheehan