Ranunculus californicus Benth. var. californicus
California buttercup
Ranunculaceae - buttercup family
status: State Threatened, BLM sensitive
rank: G5 / S1

General Description: Sparsely to copiously hairy perennial with slender, fibrous, hairy roots. Stems several, spreading or lying close to the ground but not nodally rooting, somewhat hollow, freely branched, 20-60 cm. Leaves basal, with petioles up to 12 cm long; blades 2-4 cm long and deeply trilobed into wedge-shaped, lobed, or toothed segments. Stem leaves alternate, reduced upward to bracts with linear lobes.

Floral Characteristics: Pedicels up to 15 cm long. Sepals hairy, greenish or reddish-tinged, 6-8 mm long, spreading, but the upper half partially to sharply reflexed. Petals 8-16 (sometimes more), yellow, oblong or narrowly oblanceolate, 8-15 mm long, and about 1/3 as broad. Nectary scale broadly fan-shaped, about 0.7 mm long, hairless, with lateral margins free for at least half of their length.

Fruits: Heads globose or hemispheric, up to 3 mm long in fruit, hairless. Achenes 15-40, broadly obovate in outline, 2-2.5 mm long, strongly compressed (scarcely 1/3 as thick as broad), smooth, hairless or rarely somewhat hairy, with distinct, slightly keeled margins. Stylar beak flattened, fairly stout at the base, 0.5-1 mm long, recurved at the tip. Identifiable May to June.

Identification Tips: R. californicus is similar to R. acris and R. occidentalis. However, R. acris has erect stems and only 5 petals. R. occidentalis usually has only 5-6 petals, and achenes 2.6-3.6 (4.8) mm long. R. californicus and R. occidentalis hybridize where they co-occur.

Range: Southern Vancouver Island, B.C., to southern CA.

Habitat/Ecology: Coastal bluffs, open grasslands, rocky slopes along the shore, and rocky wooded areas. Usually in dry grassland areas, but also found in moister sites. Elevations in WA: 3-15 m (10-50 ft). Associated species include Douglas-fir (Pseudotsuga menziesii), Sitka spruce (Picea sitchensis), madrone (Arbutus menziesii), kinnikinnick (Arctostaphylos uva-ursi), Rocky Mountain juniper (Juniperus scopulorum), Sitka brome (Bromus sitchensis), Nootka rose (Rosa nutkana), pink plectritis (Plectritis congesta), camas (Camassia spp.), and checker lily (Fritillaria affinis).

Comments: Known from several historical sites and fewer than 5 recent sites. This taxon is also rare in Canada.


Adapted from Field Guide to the Rare Plants of Washington
http://www.washington.edu/uwpress/search/books/CAMFIE.html