

Micropus californicus Fisch. & C. A. Meyer var. *californicus*, SLENDER COTTONWEED, COTTONTOP, Q-TIPS. Annual, taprooted, typically 1-stemmed at base, several-branched above, erect, in range 5–22(–35) cm tall; monoecious; shoots slender-stemmed with only cauline leaves, grayish, cobwebby to tomentose. **Stems:** weakly ridged, < 1 mm diameter, with ridges descending from each leaf, brown at plant base to green above, appressed-woolly with fine, long-tomentose hairs. **Leaves:** helically alternate, simple, sessile, without stipules; blade narrowly oblanceolate to elliptic or lanceolate, 5–11(–15) × 1.2–2 mm, tapered at base, entire and sometimes wavy on margins, acute to ± acuminate with minute point at tip, with midrib inconspicuous beneath dense hairs. **Inflorescence:** heads, in terminal, paniclelike arrays with 1–5 ± sessile heads on spikelike lateral branches, head disciform, spheric, 2–3 mm across increasing to 2× wide in fruit, with 3–4(–6) pistillate peripheral flowers and to 5 functionally staminate central flowers, lacking bisexual flowers; bract subtending lateral branch and head leaflike, 2.5–5 mm long (absent below terminal head); **involucre** inconspicuous, phyllaries (4–)5(–6), obovate or rounded to ovate, 1.5–2.2 × 0.8–1.3 mm, green along vein and sometimes extending to tip, colorless and scarious on margins and typically at obtuse to rounded tip, persistent; receptacle not as long as wide, with a small bump beneath pistillate flower and a bractlet (palea) subtending and enclosing that flower, with a tiny bump but lacking palea for each staminate flower, palea 1/2 heart-shaped compressed side-to-side, 2–3 mm long increasing to 4 mm long in fruit, > phyllaries, straight on inner edge but arched out and upward on outer edge, densely woolly, becoming thickened and hard in fruit, the tip through which style exerted cylindric and beaklike, 0.7–1 mm long, projected upward from inner edge, narrowly scarious-winged on margins and at tip, brownish or orange-colored. **Pistillate flower:** radial; **calyx (pappus)** absent; **corolla** minutely 4-lobed, slender-tubular, ± 1 mm long, arising laterally on the inside edge of ovary; **stamens** absent; **pistil** 1; ovary inferior, obovate compressed side-to-side, ± 1 × 0.4 mm, glabrous, 1-chambered with 1 ovule; style ± 1.5 mm long, 2-branched, the branches exerted from corolla and beak of palea; stigmas ± 0.3 mm long, orange. **Disc flower:** radial; **calyx (pappus)** typically absent but occasionally of 1–5 short, smooth, deciduous bristles; **corolla** (3–)4–5-lobed, 1–1.5–2 mm long; tube pale yellow to pale orange; throat ± 0.3 mm long, orange-red; lobes erect, triangular, sometimes paler than throat; **stamens** 4–5, fused to corolla tube, included; filaments ± 0.5 mm long; anthers fused into cylinder surrounding style, basifixed, dithecal, ± 0.5 mm long, pale yellow, with a rounded-oblong appendage at tip, longitudinally dehiscent; pollen yellow; **pistil** 1, sterile; ovary inferior but vestigial; style slightly > corolla length and exerted, unbranched. **Fruits:** cypselae, falling with and enclosed by palea, obovoid to inversely teardrop-shaped ± compressed side-to-side, 1.4–2.6 × 0.7–0.9 mm, glossy olive brown, curved, smooth, with a lateral scar of corolla; pappus absent. Mid-March–early June.

Native. Annual found throughout the range at openings in chaparral and on recent burns. *Micropus californicus* is one of the tiny, woolly annuals of tribe Gnaphalieae, which are difficult for even many professional botanists to identify with confidence, because magnification is required to recognize minute structures.

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