

Ranunculus californicus Benth. var. *californicus*, CALIFORNIA BUTTERCUP. Perennial herb, fibrous-rooted from small caudex with a short, indistinct, horizontal rhizome connecting plantlets, rosetted, several-stemmed at base, ascending to erect, 35–95 cm tall; shoots with basal leaves and often cauline leaf subtending at least the first fork, immature shoot sericeous before emerging and aging sparsely hairy with appressed, upward-pointing hairs; adventitious roots to 15 cm deep, thickish but not tuberlike. **Stems:** cylindrical, to 4(–6) mm diameter (not the widest at base), green or tinged reddish, ± glabrate with very sparse, strigose hairs; hollow. **Leaves:** helically alternate, 3-foliolate having terminal leaflet with or without petiolule (basal leaves) and deeply palmately 3-lobed (basal and cauline leaves) or rarely unlobed (cauline leaf), basal leaves long-petiolate, without stipules; petiole channeled, 75–220 mm long (basal leaves) and short–50 mm long (cauline leaves), tough, ± sheathing with colorless margins at base, sparsely strigose; blade of compound basal leaves widely heart-shaped in outline, in range 35–90 × 35–100 mm, petiolule of terminal leaflet 0–15 mm long and lateral leaflets sessile, terminal leaflet subdivided into 3 segments, the central segment wedge-shaped and symmetric with a large central tooth flanked by smaller lateral teeth, the lateral segments asymmetric and paired, segments toothed to deeply cut on margins, segments and teeth mostly acute with hard whitish point at tip, lateral leaflets ± paired, asymmetric with several lobes and teeth, 30–55 × 20–35 mm, leaflets palmately veined, dull, with soft, upward-pointing hairs; blade of cauline leaves asymmetrically subdivided into 3 linear lobes with or without 1 or more lobes or teeth (linear and without teeth), terminal segment to 60 × 43 mm, lateral segments unequal and not paired, 22–25+ × 18–20 mm, the lower lateral segment > upper lateral segment. **Inflorescence:** cyme, terminal and axillary, several-flowered and open, bracteate, strigose; peduncle ascending, to 250 mm long; bract subtending branch or pedicel leaflike and narrowly linear or 3-lobed; pedicel cylindrical, 6–20 mm long increasing 2× in fruit, green, short-strigose and strigose with arching hairs. **Flower:** bisexual, radiate, 13.5–27 mm across, rotate; receptacle conelike (torus); **sepals** 5(–6), helically alternate and slightly overlapping at base, cupped-ovate to cupped-elliptic, in range 5.2–5.5 × 2–2.5 mm, reflexed 2–3 mm above base, yellow with green tip aging reddish and broad tan-membranous margins, acute at tip, inconspicuously (5)7-veined, sparsely to moderately villous to pilose; **petals** 11–22, helically alternate, clawed, oblong, in range 5–13 × 2–3 mm, bright yellow and upper surface glossy, claw 0.9–1.2 mm long, narrowly tapered at base, rounded at tip, with ca. 10 veins, **nectary** above each claw = glossy cuplike flap covering nectary, 0.4–0.6 × 0.7–0.9 mm, flap rounded or broadly obtuse at tip; **stamens** 30–40+, helically alternate, free, staminodes absent; filaments tapered to base, 2.4–3.9 mm long, decreasing outer to inner stamens, 0.35–0.4 mm wide below anther, bright yellow, glabrous; anthers basifixed, dithecal, oblong-ovate, ca. 1.3 × 0.9 mm, bright yellow, longitudinally dehiscent; pollen bright yellow; **pistils** 18–35+, helically alternate, free, δ-shaped, 1–1.3 × 0.5–0.6 mm; ovary superior, roundish compressed side-to-side, green, glabrous, 1-chambered with 1 ovule attached at base; style tapered base-to-tip, ca. 0.5 mm long, green and yellow below midpoint and red above midpoint, on the outermost pistil curved upward but others curved outward; stigma decurrent along inner side (adaxial) of style, papillate. **Fruits:** achenes with persistent beak, 5–35, helically arranged on conelike receptacle, roundish to obovate or D-shaped compressed side-to-side but sides not flat, 2.8–3.4 × 2.7–3 mm, brown with a paler, tanner margin, angled or slight notched at

base of beak (style); beak to 0.8 mm long or abscising; receptacle glabrous. Late February–mid-May.

Native. Perennial herb encountered in grassy habitats growing especially in heavy clay and most common in the vicinity of oak woodland. *Ranunculus californicus* has palmately lobed and compound basal leaves somewhat resembling delphiniums, members of the same family. California buttercup blooms beginning in early spring, and the plant dies to the ground before summer drought. This is the only terrestrial species in range having a flower with more than ten bright yellow petals, many stamens, and many pistils, being comparable only to the floating aquatic water lily (*Nymphaea mexicana*) in its overall design, but can never be confused with it.

B. A. Prigge & A. C. Gibson