

Buckwheats All Around Us in Grand Staircase-Escalante Region

Web Staley, BLM Range Technician

Marc Coles-Ritchie, BLM Ecologist

Dec 2025



Why Science Talks

GSENM Science Coordinator:

“Leads the promotion and delivery of science education and public outreach programs to obtain and embrace appreciation for the protection of Monument resources, objects, and values.”



Web Site

Home > Programs > National Conservation Lands > Utah > Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument > Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument Science & Research

Science & Research

What's new?

Science Plan Update

Science Lecture Series

The Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument hosts a lecture series at the Kanab Library at 374 N Main St, Kanab, UT 84741. Times are 6pm unless noted otherwise, and the public is invited to attend these free events. If you have ideas for topics or speakers, contact [Marc Coles-Ritchie](mailto:mcolesritchie@blm.gov) at mcolesritchie@blm.gov. See below for additional information.

Science Lecture Series

The Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument science program hosts a lecture series at the Kanab Library at 374 N Main St, Kanab, UT 84741. Times are 6pm unless noted otherwise, and the public is invited to attend these free events. If you have ideas for topics or speakers, contact [Marc Coles-Ritchie](mailto:mcolesritchie@blm.gov) at mcolesritchie@blm.gov. See below for additional information.

Upcoming Lectures

- December 10: Native buckwheat plants of GSENM (Webinar)
- January 14, 2026: Geology and Plant Road Guide to Cottontop
- February 11, 2026: Utah Prairie dog impacts from new plan
- March 11, 2026: Wildlife (Joel Berger)
- April 8, 2026: River restoration (Mark Briggs)
- May, 2026: Amazing Earthfest has many science and nature activities
- June 10, 2026
- July 8, 2026
- August 12, 2026
- September 9, 2026
- October 14, 2026: How to photograph in the desert response
- November 11, 2026
- December 9, 2026

Past Presentations

News and Stories

Plan Your Visit

Safety and Conditions

Visitor Centers

Science Lecture Series

The Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument science program hosts a lecture series at the Kanab Library at 374 N Main St, Kanab, UT 84741. Times are 6pm unless noted otherwise, and the public is invited to attend these free events. If you have ideas for topics or speakers, contact [Marc Coles-Ritchie](mailto:mcolesritchie@blm.gov) at mcolesritchie@blm.gov. See below for additional information about future and past presentations.

Upcoming Lectures

Past Presentations

Did you miss a science presentation of ours or just wanted the slides from one? No problem! You can find them below.

Plants

Animals

Archaeology & History

Soils, Biocrust & Lichens

News and Stories

Plan Your Visit

Safety and Conditions

Visitor Centers

Past Presentations

Did you miss a science presentation of ours or just wanted the slides from one? No problem! You can find them below.

Plants

Animals

[Utah's Amazing Bees and How We Can Help Them](#)

Amy Dolan, Xerces Society
Conservation Biologist Mountain States BBA Coordinator

[Wildlife in a challenged world](#)

Joel Berger

[Bats of GSENM](#)

Jackie Grant

Archaeology & History

[Utah Cultural Site Stewardship](#)

Lexi Little, Operations Coordinator for the Utah Cultural Site Stewardship Program
Caitlyn McAllister Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument Archaeologist

[Enigmatic Traces of Sacred Water: Cup and Channel Petroglyphs of the Far West](#)

Michael L. Terlep, Archaeologist, North Kaibab Ranger District, Kaibab National Forest

Soils, Biocrust & Lichens

- [Monument Homepage](#)
- [Working With Us](#)
- [Science Research Application](#)

Science Compilations

- [Deep Roots: A 10,000-year Indigenous History of GSENM \(2021\)](#)
- [Digital Collection at SUU Library](#)
- [Science Symposium Proceedings 2016](#)
- [Science Symposium Proceedings 2006](#)
- [Science Symposium Proceedings 1997](#)

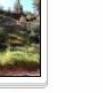
Partners

- [ARS - SW Watershed Research Center](#)
- [Denver Museum of Nature and Science](#)
- [Glen Canyon Conservancy](#)
- [Southern Utah University IIC](#)

Photos are by Web and Marc (unless noted) in GSENM or nearby. Many of Marc's photos are in these [Flickr albums](#).

Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument

click here to add a description

 Plants of Grand... 391 photos Edit	 Old Trees of Grand... 51 photos Edit	 Deer Springs Fire, Timber... 203 photos, 5 videos Edit	 Deer Springs Fire, Nephi... 37 photos, 3 videos Edit	 Impressive Plants in Spring... 19 photos Edit
 Mushrooms of Grand Staircase 3 photos Edit	 Non-native plants of Grand... 24 photos Edit	 Biocrust of Grand Staircase 36 photos Edit	 Springs & Streams of GSENM 149 photos Edit	 Good Riparian Condition GSENM 18 photos Edit
 Paria River, North of Paria... 10 photos Edit	 Wildlife of Grand... 36 photos, 4 videos Edit	 Big Bows Bench 67 photos Edit	 King Bench Plants 12 photos Edit	 Geology of Grand... 29 photos Edit
 Lick Wash 7 photos, 2 videos Edit	 Death Hollow 27 photos Edit	 Willis Spring 19 photos Edit	 Henriveau Creek and Wetlands 5 photos Edit	 Escalante River 15 photos Edit

Buckwheat Family

- *Polygonaceae*: Buckwheat family
(aka Knotweed or Smartweed family)
 - 48 Genera in North America
 - 1,200 species

Sand dock (*Rumex hymenosepalus*)



Alpine sorrel (*Oxyria digyna*)



- *Eriogonum*: genus called “wild buckwheats”
 - 250 species in North America
 - Mostly in Western US
 - 25 species in GSENM (and varieties)



Crispleaf Buckwheat
(*Eriogonum corymbosum*)



Desert Trumpet (*Eriogonum inflatum*)

Buckwheat as Food

- *Fagopyrum esculentum*
- Cultivation began 6th millennium BC in China
- Large seeds (grain-like), can be ground into flour
- Not related to wheat; gluten free
- Used around world for food
 - Soba noodles
 - Italian pasta (pasta di grano saraceno)
 - Pancakes
 - Tea
 - many other uses...



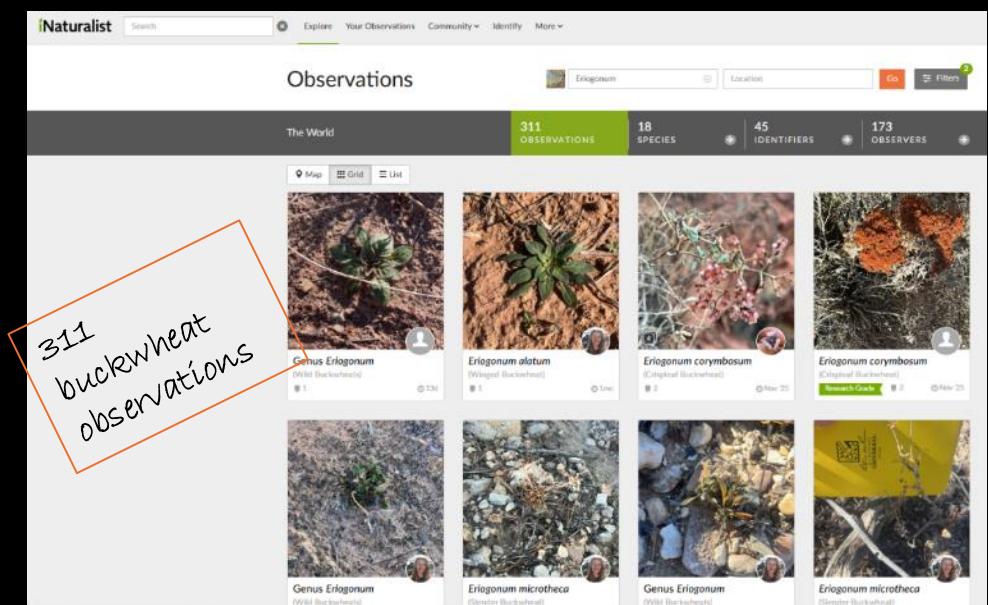
Photo by Andreas Rockstein in Germany



Photo by Tomasz Stramel in Poland

Why a talk on buckwheats?

- Buckwheat: genus w 2nd most species (250) in Western US.
 - Penstemon has a few more
- Eriogonum Society
 - 89 attended last annual meeting in Bishop, CA
- iNaturalist has 311 *Eriogonum* observations in GSENM
 - 355 for penstemon
 - 256 for globemallow
- Beautiful shapes
- Colorful in Fall (and winter?)
- Grow in challenging conditions
- Challenge to identify



Fall colors



Buckwheats in challenging settings



Deer Springs Burn, Sept 30



Sunset Crater Nat. Monument, Nov 8

Sunset Crater Nat.
Monument,
November 8

Two species of
buckwheats:
--Sorrel (linear)
--Crispleaf (round)



Buckwheats in challenging environments



Skutumpah Canyon,
September 16

The Blues (between Henrievile and Escalante) August 27



Characteristics of Wild Buckwheats (*Eriogonum*)

- Often
 - Leaves
 - Simple (not compound with leaflets)
 - Margins smooth or wavy (not toothed)
 - Alternate
 - Leathery
 - Whitish (hairs)
 - Stems
 - Swollen joints (at nodes)
 - Upright and/or branching
 - Whitish (hairs)
 - Flowers
 - Small, papery
 - Clusters
 - or
 - Umbrella form (mobile)
 - Yellow, white, pink (often two-tone)
 - Fruits 3-angled or lens-shaped



Photo by Braydon Lake





Nodding Buckwheat (*Eriogonum cernuum*)

Skutumpah Canyon,
September 16

Ethnobotany

Indigenous Use of Buckwheats

- Food (seeds, stems, roots)
- Medicine
 - for stomach-ache, lameness, rheumatism, colds, and more
- Skin application (lotion)
- Smoking instrument (pipe)
- Smoking material

Warning: only use plants for medicine if you are an expert



References

- Wyman, Leland Clifton, and Stuart Kimball Harris. 1951. The Ethnobotany of the Kayenta Navaho. The University of New Mexico Press
- Rhode, David. 2002. Native Plants of Southern Nevada: An Ethnobotany. The University of Utah Press
- SEINet.org (Southwestern Environmental Information Network)
- [BRIT - Native American Ethnobotany Database](http://BRIT.org)

Indigenous Knowledge

- Tribes connected to this land include Paiute, Hopi, Zuni, Pueblo, Dine' (Navajo), Ute and others.
- Indigenous people lived off this land.
- Indigenous knowledge-holders continue to use Buckwheat and other plants.

Rare Buckwheats in Southern Utah

- Soil specialists
- In low competition settings
- Isolation leads to speciation
 - Many varieties
- Rare:
 - Crisp-leaf buckwheat varieties (*Eriogonum corymbosum* varieties)
 - Bull Mountain Wild Buckwheat (*Eriogonum cronequistii*) in Henry Mountains
 - Zion wild buckwheat (*Eriogonum zionis*)
 - Many others...



Photo by Matt Reala

Annual vs. Perennial Buckwheats

Characteristic	Annual	Perennial
Roots	Shallow and fibrous	Deep and thick
Woody	Not woody. Plants die each year. Only reproduce from seed.	Often woody. Plants live many years.
Leaf	Round	Elongated
Size	1 to 3 feet tall Spindly	1 to 7 feet tall. Bushy



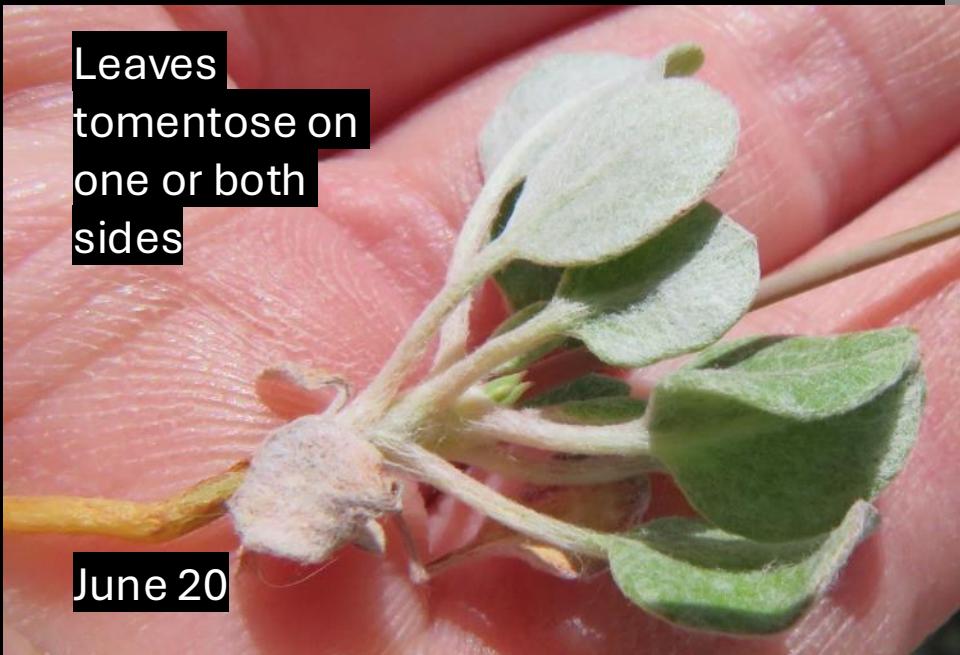
Annual Buckwheats of GSENM

- In this presentation
 - Nodding buckwheat (*Eriogonum cernuum*)
 - Flatcrown buckwheat or skeletonweed (*Eriogonum deflexum*)
 - Spindle buckwheat (*Eriogonum fusiforme*)
 - Palmer's Buckwheat (*Eriogonum palmerianum*)
 - Kidney-shaped buckwheat (*Eriogonum subreniforme*)
- Not in this presentation
 - Bent
 - Wetherill's
 - Darrow's
 - Davidson's
 - Gordon's
 - Watson's
 - Smooth
 - Westwater

Nodding Buckwheat (*Eriogonum cernuum*)



Wait a few weeks from the rosette stage and behold the glory! A beautiful inflorescence with “nodding” flowers, like hanging streetlamps



Nodding Buckwheat (*Eriogonum cernuum*)



Skutumpah Canyon, September 16

Flatcrown buckwheat (*Eriogonum deflexum*)



West of Coral Pink Sands, September 1



Apple Valley, September 15
By Braydon Lake

Nodding Buckwheat (*Eriogonum cernuum*)

- Outer perianth segments truncate to obtuse basally
- Leaf bases cuneate to slightly cordate
- Involucres usually stalked
- Tepals constricted below the middle, violin-shaped



VS.

Flatcrown Buckwheat (*Eriogonum deflexum*)

- Leaves and outer perianth segments cordate at base
- Involucres usually sessile



Spindle Buckwheat (*Eriogonum fusiforme*)



Following a wet winter, the Tropic shale north of Lake Powell can be covered in blankets of yellow from the flowers



- Annual
- Flowering stems and inflorescence branches greenish or yellowish green
- Leaves all basal and are orbicular to oblong or kidney-shaped with distinct venation
- Unmistakable inflated inflorescence stem segments

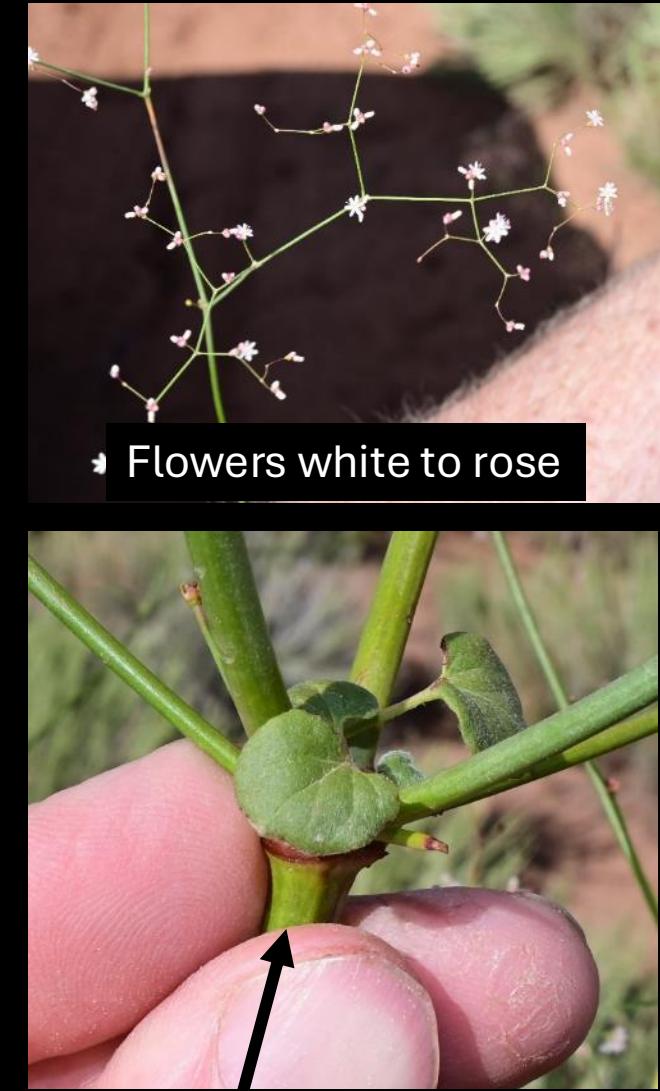
Palmer's Buckwheat (*Eriogonum palmerianum*)



- Annual
- 6-25 cm tall
- leaves all basal
- branches of inflorescence diverge widely and have short woolly hairs
- Flowers sessile, white or pink
- The specimens pictured here are from the Kaiparowits Plateau, which is the most common place they are found on the GSENM



Kidneyshape Buckwheat (*Eriogonum subreniforme*)



Perennial Buckwheats of GSENM

- Winged buckwheat (*Eriogonum alatum*)
- Crispleaf buckwheat (*Eriogonum corymbosum*)
- Desert trumpet (*Eriogonum inflatum*)
- Sand buckwheat (*Eriogonum leptocladon*)
- Slender buckwheat (*Eriogonum microthecum*)
- Cushion buckwheat (*Eriogonum ovalifolium*)
- Panguitch buckwheat (*Eriogonum panguicense*)
- Redroot buckwheat (*Eriogonum racemosum*)
- Shockley's Buckwheat (*Eriogonum shockleyi*)
- Thompson's Buckwheat (*Eriogonum thompsonae* var. *thompsonae*)
- Sulphur flower (*Eriogonum umbellatum*); varieties with Flat top and Round top
- Zion Buckwheat (*Eriogonum zionis* var. *zionis*)

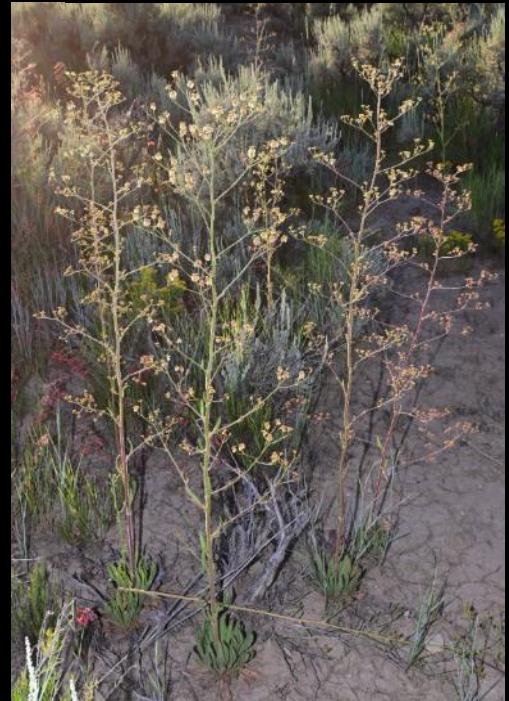
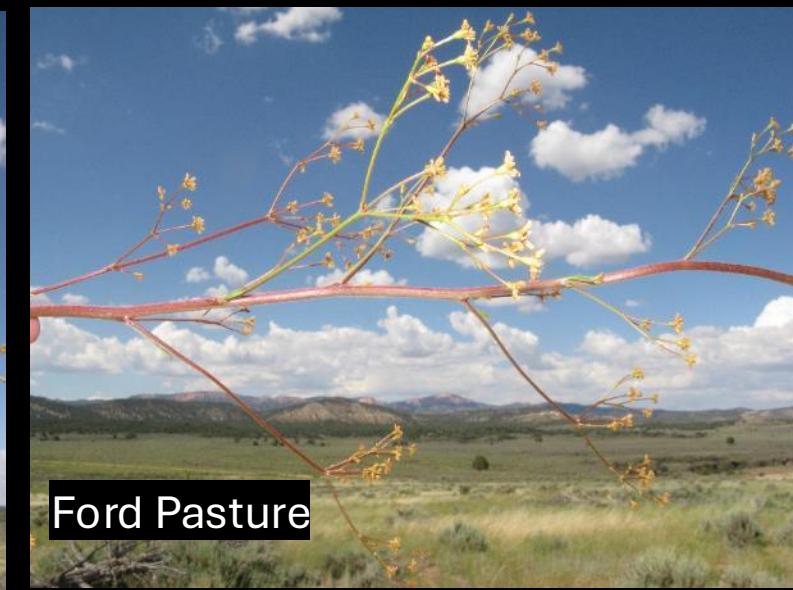
Winged Buckwheat (*Eriogonum alatum*)

Common on Ford Pasture
(the valley at the E end of
Glendale Bench Rd)



Leaves long,
oblanceolate at
base distinguish it
from other
GSENM
Buckwheats

Photos July 12-16



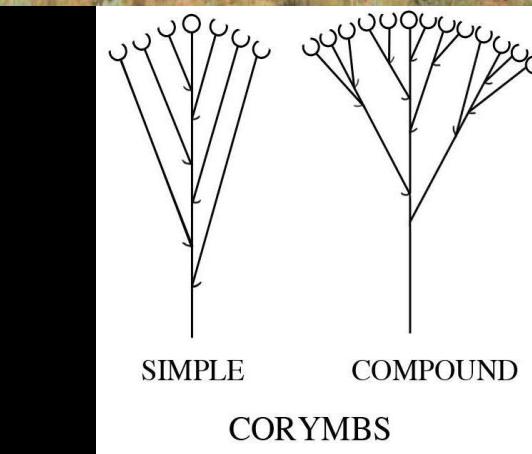
Winged buckwheat (*Eriogonum alatum*)

Coral Pink Sands, Sept 1

Crispleaf Buckwheat (*Eriogonum corymbosum*)



Sep 6



Aug-Sep the entire top of the dome-shaped exterior can be covered in tiny white/pink flowers



Aug 10

One of the largest, shrubbiest buckwheats in our area; sometimes grows to sagebrush size



May 30



Crispleaf Buckwheat (*Eriogonum corymbosum*)



Yellow-flowered Crispleaf
Buckwheat
(*Eriogonum corymbosum* var.
glutinosum)

Photo by Bill Orman, Tuba City, AZ



Desert Trumpet (*Eriogonum inflatum*)

Does it look familiar?



Desert Trumpet (*Eriogonum inflatum*)

- Perennial
- Flowering stems and inflorescence grayish
- Inflated part less pronounced
- Usually found on gravelly soils



Southwest of Fredonia, Sep 14;
photo by Braydon Lake

Spindle Buckwheat (*Eriogonum fusiforme*)

- Annual
- Flowering stems and inflorescence branches greenish or yellowish green
- Inflated part more pronounced
- Usually found on fine-textured soils



On Tropic shale east
of Big Water, May 14

In addition to common names used here, these species have also been called: Bladderstem, Bottlestopper, Bottlebush and Indian Pipeweed

Sand Buckwheat (*Eriogonum leptocladon*)



- These specimens found in sandy soil near Hole In The Rock Rd
- Similar in size and shrubiness to Crispleaf Buckwheat but Sand Buckwheat has leaves that are longer in relation to their width than those of Crispleaf

Sand Buckwheat (*Eriogonum leptocladon*)



Coral Pink Sands September 13



Slender Buckwheat (*Eriogonum microthecum*)



Photos Aug 16-Sep 13



Woody lower stems & root

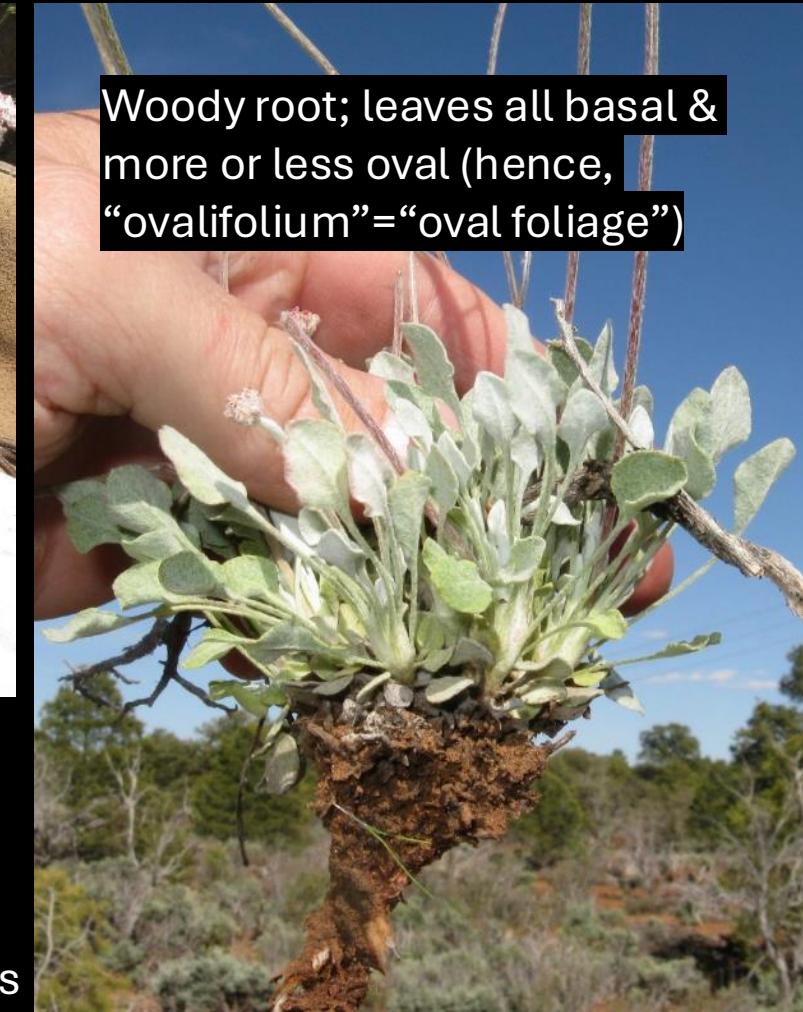


Leaves dark green on top, whitish (due to hairs) on underside, elliptic to linear, mostly revolute (edges curl downward), and small (usually about 1-2 cm in length)



Clusters of tiny flowers

Cushion Buckwheat (*Eriogonum ovalifolium*)



- Perennial
- A broad basal “cushion” of leaves
- Flower clusters on long stalks

Photos from Buckskin Mtn, May 24-Jun 6

Cushion Buckwheat (*Eriogonum ovalifolium*)



May 10 at
Tilted Mesa

Panguitch Buckwheat (*Eriogonum panguicense*)

- Inflorescence unbranched
- Flowers white suffused with pink/purple
- Uncommon on GSENM



Photos by Braydon Lake



Panguitch buckwheat (*Eriogonum panguicense*)



Redroot Buckwheat (*Eriogonum racemosum*)



Leaves ovate to oblanceolate



Photos July 16 - Aug 20



Inflorescence in a raceme (elongated stalk)



Shockley's Buckwheat (*Eriogonum shockleyi*)



- Plants caespitose (growing in dense tufts) and cushion- or mound-forming
- These photos are of a specimen growing on shallow soil and bedrock on the bench southwest of Crosby Canyon (Glen Canyon National Rec. Area) May 15

Shockley's Buckwheat (*Eriogonum shockleyi*)

Photo by Christine Prins, June 3, Egypt Road



Thompson's Buckwheat (*Eriogonum thompsonae* var. *thompsonae*)



Photos Aug 25 near
Kanab Trail (north of
Jacob Hamblin Park)

Similar to Crispleaf Buckwheat in that...

- Leaf blades are similar in size, shape, color and pubescence

But different in that...

- Thompson's leaf blades are all basal with long petioles; flowers yellow
- Crispleaf leaf blades are basal as well as cauline (on the stems) w/ very short petioles; flowers whitish/pink

Thompson's Buckwheat (*Eriogonum thompsonae* var. *thompsonae*)



Mansard Trail on September 13

Sulphur Flower Buckwheat (*Eriogonum umbellatum*)

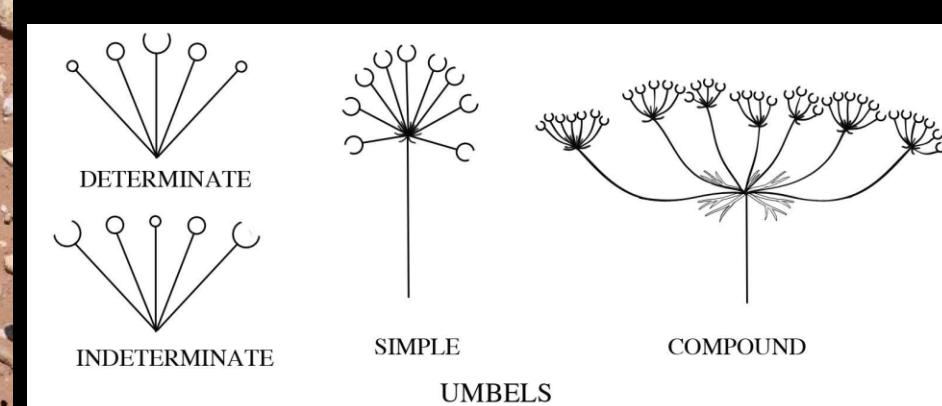


Photos
Jun 29-
Aug 8

Leaves medium to
dark green, tomentose
to glabrous



Along Skutumpah Rd



Sulphur Flower Buckwheat (*Eriogonum umbellatum*)



Zion Buckwheat (*Eriogonum zionis* var. *zionis*)

- Resembles Redroot Buckwheat (*E. racemosum*) but note slightly swollen inflorescence stems
- 2025 draft list of BLM State Sensitive Species
- Photos Jun 7-Aug 31



Zion Buckwheat (*Eriogonum zionis* var. *zionis*)



Culturally
important to
Tribal
communities



Acknowledgments

- Glenn Rink – botanist in Flagstaff, re-writing the *Eriogonum* treatment for Arizona
- Kris Valles – Intermountain Herbarium, USU
- Braydon Lake – botanist and photographer

