



GET TO KNOW THE PLATEAU

Creeping Rushpea

Hoffmannseggia repens

Habitat & Ecology

The Colorado Plateau is a region known for its endemism, meaning it is home to species that occur nowhere else in the world. One of these species is the creeping rushpea, found mainly in southern and central parts of eastern Utah, including Glen Canyon National Recreation Area and the San Rafael Swell. It can be considered locally common in certain areas. It has also been documented in western Colorado. Unlike many of us, creeping rushpea prefers the desert sand in the direct sunlight. Though it can survive across a wide elevational gradient it is more commonly found at elevations between 1,430-1,670 meters (4,700-5,550 ft). Creeping rushpea tends to grow alongside other high desert shrubs and grasses such as mormon tea (*Ephedra* sp.) and indian rice grass (*Achnatherum hymnoides*).

Description

Creeping rushpea is a member of the Fab family—short for Fabaceae or Fabulous or both, that's for you to decide. This little forb grows between 5-12.5 cm (2-5 inches) and generally looks its best in bloom from late spring to early summer (April-June). As it develops, it likes to spread (or creep) its short stems low to the ground. Its overall pinnate leaf structure refers to the neat arrangement of pinnae (each leaf) neatly arranged side by side and across from each

other along a main stem. The flowering raceme is full of vibrant yellow petals that are sure to draw you in and with a closer look you can make out the slightest dots and tinges of red or orange adding to the yellow. Its entire lifecycle can be summed up by its common name, from its early creep to its late bean pods or peas.



H. repens in full bloom/Zach Coury CC BY-NC

Endemic Species of the Colorado Plateau



H. repens near Capricorn Mesa in Utah/Zach Coury CC BY-NC

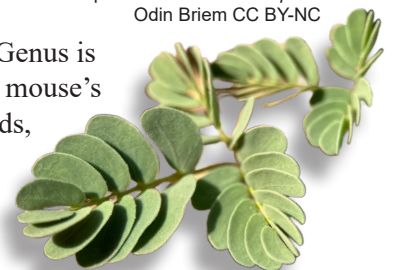
Conservation Status and Threats

According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List, *Hoffmannseggia repens* is near threatened. The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service lists it as S2 meaning imperiled. NatureServe Explorer lists it as a G3 or vulnerable species due to its fairly restricted range. The main threats of this beautiful plant are recreation impacts from off road vehicles, grazing, and invasive exotic plants.

Of Note

The Spanish name for this Genus is Camote de Raton, meaning mouse's sweet potato because its pods, while small, are eaten by many small desert animals.

The pinnate leaves of *H. repens*
Odin Briem CC BY-NC



References

- Andersen, Berniece A. 1996. Desert Plants of Utah, pg 64.
- NatureServe. 2024. NatureServe Network Biodiversity Location Data accessed through NatureServe Explorer. NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available <https://explorer.natureserve.org/>. (Accessed: October 08, 2024).

Written by Noah A. Guyton