Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program
Division of Fisheries & Wildlife
Route 135
Westborough, MA 01581
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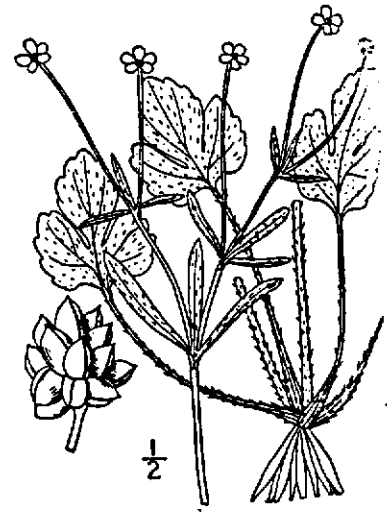
Massachusetts Natural Heritage Program

MASSACHUSETTS RARE AND ENDANGERED PLANTS

Tiny-flowered Buttercup
Ranunculus micranthus (Nutt.)

Description

Tiny-flowered Buttercup is a small inconspicuous member of the Buttercup family which grows to about 8 inches (.2 m) tall. Several stems arise from the base and each stem is topped by one to several tiny yellow-petaled flowers that are 5-6 mm across. The basal leaves are oval or rhombic shaped and grow on long stalks. The leaves on the flowering stems are very short and are narrowly segmented. The whole plant is covered with short hairs. This species is a spring ephemeral blooming early, (between May 4 and 30), before the leaves of the canopy trees are out. It then fruits and withers away in early July.



An Illustrated Flora of the U.S. and Canada. Britton and Brown. 1970. Vol. II p.110

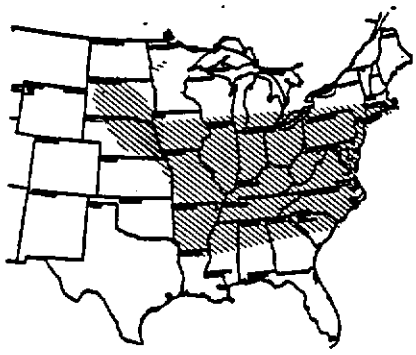
Similar Species

Small-flowered Buttercup (Ranunculus abortivus) is very similar to the Tiny-flowered Buttercup, but has heart-shaped or rotund basal leaves and is completely hairless. Small-flowered Buttercups prefer more moist soils (mesic to fairly wet) than Tiny-flowered Buttercups, although they can occur on talus slopes and ledges.

Range

Tiny-flowered Buttercup occurs from Massachusetts to Illinois and South Dakota, south to northern Georgia and Arkansas. It is uncommon throughout most of its range. Peabody and Salem, Massachusetts mark the species' northern range limit.

(Continued overleaf)



Distribution

● Verified since 1978
○ Reported prior to 1978

Distribution in Massachusetts by Town

Habitat in Massachusetts

Tiny-flowered Buttercup occurs on shelves and crevices of circumneutral (non-acid), low rocky ledges under a light to moderate canopy. Canopy trees include Red Oak, Pignut Hickory, Sugar Maple, Hop Hornbeam, and Flowering Dogwood. Associated herbaceous plants include Ebony Spleenwort, Blunt-lobed Woodsia, Early Saxifrage, White Wood Aster, False Solomon's-seal, Hepatica, and Three-lobed Violet.

Population Status

Tiny-flowered Buttercup is listed as "Threatened" by the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. Currently (since 1978), there are three sites in Massachusetts where this species is known to occur. Historically, (prior to 1978), it was known from an additional ten sites. This species was probably never common in the state due to a lack of suitable habitat. Most of the historical occurrences are within route 128 and have not been rediscovered. Some of these may have been lost to development while others may have been victims of frequent burning.