

Cressa L. ALKALI WEED

Cressa truxillensis Kunth. Perennial herb, in range halophytic, trailing, rhizomatous, fibrous-rooted, several-stemmed at base, prostrate with ascending branches from main axis, lateral branches often unbranched below inflorescence, 7–25 cm tall; shoots with ascending to erect, overlapping cauline leaves (= internodes typically ca. 3 mm long), densely appressed-sericeous with somewhat wavy hairs; rhizomes deep-seated, cylindrical, 2–2.5 mm diameter, flexible, smooth-barked, with irregularly spaced spheroidal buds. **Stems (aboveground):** cylindrical, ca. 1 mm diameter, densely soft-hairy. **Leaves:** helically alternate, simple, short-petiolate, without stipules; petiole 0.3–1 mm long, short-hairy; blade lanceolate to elliptic, (3–)4–11 × (1–)1.5–4(–6) mm (cauline leaves closest to rhizome often obovate and sessile), broadly tapered at base, entire, acute at tip, obscurely veined, surfaces equally soft-hairy. **Inflorescence:** leafy raceme, terminal on main and lateral shoots, many-flowered, flowers helically arranged but raceme somewhat 1-sided by reorientation of flowers, bracteate, densely sericeous to villous; bractlet subtending pedicel leaflike, ± sessile; pedicel cylindrical, 2–2.5 mm long; bracteoles 2, opposite, subtending base of and appressed to calyx, oblanceolate to lanceolate, 2–2.5 × 0.6–0.7 mm, green, densely soft-hairy on outer surface and also above midpoint on inner surface. **Flower:** bisexual, radial, 6–7 mm across; **sepals** 5, scarcely fused at base, with erect, overlapping lobes forming a narrowly obovoid calyx; tube 0.3 mm long; lobes tightly appressed to corolla, equal, narrowly obovate to elliptic, 3.4–4 × 2 mm, membranous on margins to just above midpoint of 2 inner sepals, outer surface densely sericeous, inner surface glabrous; **corolla** 5-lobed, white; tube bell-shaped, ± 4 × 2 mm, concealed by calyx; lobes spreading to recurved, ovate, 3 × 1.5 mm, acute at tip, lower (outer) surface with long hairs above midpoint; **stamens** 5, fused to base of corolla for 2 mm and forming a 1 mm column uniting filaments; filaments flared at fused base, free portion 3–4 mm long, white; anthers dorsifixed, dithecal, arrow-shaped, ± 1.5 mm long, pale rose and creamy yellow aging darker sometimes to rose-purple, longitudinally dehiscent; pollen light yellow; **nectary disc** surrounding base of ovary, orange-yellow, glabrous; **pistil** 1, ± 7.5 mm long; ovary superior, obovoid, 1.2–1.5 × 1 mm, pale yellowish green, densely hairy, incompletely 2-chambered with short descending partition, lower chamber with 4 ovules attached at base; styles 2, exerted, slightly unequal, cylindrical, 4–5 mm long, whitish, glabrous; stigmas broadly capitate, 0.6–0.8 mm diameter, pale yellow-green, minutely papillate. **Fruit:** capsule, splitting along several lines from base upward, 1-seeded, ovoid, ca. 5 mm long, somewhat glossy straw-colored to brown and with white hairs above midpoint, with conspicuous tuft of hairs at tip. **Seed:** irregularly ellipsoid, ca. 2.5 × 1.5 mm, dull brownish red, minutely roughened. Early May–early October.

Native. Die-back perennial of sandy soil growing within and on the edge of salt marsh where plants are never covered by salt water (Pt. Mugu). *Cressa truxillensis* has densely soft-hairy shoots, which are reminiscent of certain species of *Calystegia*, but flowers of *Cressa* (inconspicuous among the leaves) are essentially larger versions of dodder (*Cuscuta*). The nectary disc is bright orange-yellow, but effective pollination appears uncommon, and the capsule of *Cressa*, when fertile, contains a single seed by abortion of the other ovules.

B. A. Prigge & A. C. Gibson