

PEST OF THE MONTH

SAFFRON THISTLE (CARTHAMUS LANATUS)

Saffron thistle is widespread in parts of Australia, from where it was accidentally introduced here as a contaminant in imported wheat.

It was first recorded in New Zealand in 1931 and most of the early infestations were associated with fowl runs, but it has since become established on farmland.

Saffron thistle is an upright, woody-stemmed, hairy annual thistle with solitary yellow flowers at the end of each branch. The flowers are the same colour as saffron, hence its name. It favours sunny, well-drained sites on pastoral land, and the bright yellow flowers (first appearing in December), along with its grey-green appearance and sharply

serrated and pointed leaves, make it stand out from the other species of thistle.

Growing to about one metre tall, these hard, spiny plants can form dense stands that impede stock movement and can cause injury to the eyes and mouths of grazing animals. The sharp dry spikes get into the wool and can cause injury when shearing or handling sheep. It has heavy seeds that usually drop close to the parent plant and can last up to 20 years in the soil, making eradication very difficult. The seed can be moved by stock, people or machinery.

In the Tasman/Nelson region, the known sites are limited to a small number of properties in the Maitai Valley, Spring Grove, Wakefield area and the lower Motueka Valley. Its limited distribution and the presence of extensive areas of suitable habitat and the potential to spread have placed this plant at the top



Photo: L. Grueber

of the pest list in the Regional Strategy with eradication the goal.

If you suspect you have seen this plant, please contact a Biosecurity Officer by phoning Council Ph. 03 543 8400.