

Gatekeeper aberration *Pyronia tithonus* ab. *bipupillata* at Trench Wood

Patrick Taylor

On 28th July 2022 on a visit to Trench Wood I observed a slightly odd-looking brown butterfly. It had two ‘pupils’ on the forewing which clearly made it a Gatekeeper *Pyronia tithonus*, but I had never seen one with the “eyes” almost split into two with a pupil in each part. It obligingly posed for a photo (01) so on returning home I quickly checked my old butterfly book that includes a few aberrations (Emmet and Heath 1990) but could not find one that matched, so I assumed that this specimen was within the normal range of variation.



01. Gatekeeper *Pyronia tithonus* ab. *bipupillata* at Trench Wood on 28th July 2022. Patrick Taylor.

Several months later, I decided it was worth following up more thoroughly. The British Butterfly Aberrations website led me to a provisional identification of *Pyronia tithonus* ab. *antiparvipunctata*, but I still had little idea whether this was of any significance. I posted the photo on the Butterfly Conservation West Midlands Facebook group and I received the following interesting response from Andrew Magnay:

“ab. *antiparvipunctata* (Leeds 1950) (02) has a smaller apical spot, not specified that the two pupils are in different dark spots, so presumably just the one dark spot. UK aberrations website shows ab. *bipupillata* but misnamed as ab. *antiparvipunctata*. But these abs show continuous variation with intermediates, so they’re all just variations of the normal... Your pic is a really nice example, far better than the type specimen figured as ab. *bipupillata* (Leeds 1950). Apical spot waisted or fully separated into two-pupilled dark spots instead of one dark spot with two white pupils in it. There is a similar specimen in BMNH ex-A.D.A Russwurm’s famous historical collection (03). It’s not figured in Russwurm’s beautiful book ‘*Aberrations of British Butterflies*’ sadly.”



02. *Pyronia tithonus* ab. *bipupillata* as illustrated in Leeds (1950).



Pyronia tithonus britanniae ab. bip...

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03. *Pyronia tithonus* ab. *bipupillata* – BMNH specimen ex-A.D.A. Russwurm collection.

Having studied the plates in the original paper by Leeds (Leeds 1950) (02) and the BMNH specimen (03), I believe the correct identification of this butterfly is Gatekeeper *Pyronia tithonus* ab. *bipupillata*.

I will be taking a close look at Gatekeepers and related brown butterflies this year in the hope of finding more interesting examples.

References

- British Butterfly Aberrations. Available at: www.britishbutterflyaberrations.co.uk [accessed 08/05/2023].
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- Emmet, A.M., Heath, J. (Eds) 1990. *The Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland*. Harley Books, Colchester
- Leeds, H. A. 1950. British aberrations of the Gatekeeper Butterfly, *Maniola tithonus* (Linnaeus 1771); Meadow Brown Butterfly, *Maniola jurtina* (Linnaeus 1758); and the Small Heath Butterfly, *Coenonympha pamphilus* (Linnaeus 1758). *Proc. Trans. S. London. Ent. Nat. Hist. Soc.*, 49, 80-122.80-122.
- Russwurm, A.D.A. 1978. *Aberrations of British Butterflies* E.W. Classey Ltd.

Images

- 01 – *Pyronia tithonus* ab. *bipupillata* at Trench Wood on 28th July 2022. Patrick Taylor.
- 02 – *Pyronia tithonus* ab. *bipupillata* as illustrated in Leeds (1950).
- 03 – *Pyronia tithonus* ab. *bipupillata* – BNHM specimen ex-A.D.A. Russwurm collection.

Editor’s Note (BW)

This reminded me of a blind Ringlet *Aphantopus hyperantus* I found in Wyre a few years ago (below).

