

Difficult Moths: *Pyrausta aurata* and *Pyrausta purpuralis*

It is unsafe to rely on forewing characteristics alone to separate these two tiny but common day-flying species, both of which often frequent the same habitat. *Pyrausta aurata* seems to be the more numerous in gardens but both can be found together. In order to confirm the identity of one of these moths you will need to capture it and check diagnostic features on both the upper and undersides, given in **green** below. Casual (non-captured) records using forewing markings alone are not sufficiently reliable to provide positive identification. The moths will be listed as “*Pyrausta* aggregate” on the website unless you can confirm that the diagnostic features mentioned here have been checked. If in doubt, specimens can be sent to your County Recorder or to the Bucks Moth Officer for confirmation.

Pyrausta aurata



DIAGNOSTIC FEATURE: Yellow/cream band on upper side of hindwing with no additional spot closer to the basal area (wings must be widely open to confirm). **OTHER FEATURES:** Forewing upperside markings on *Pyrausta aurata* should comprise a noticeable gold spot with some other minor gold speckling. Forewing underside should have only a very faint sub-terminal line (if present at all). The underside of the abdomen should be black. However, none of these other features is diagnostic on its own.

Pyrausta purpuralis



DIAGNOSTIC FEATURES: White/cream band on upperside of hindwing with an additional spot closer to the basal area (wings must be widely open to confirm). To further separate this species from the similar but much rarer *Pyrausta ostrinalis*, the forewing underside must also be inspected. On *Pyrausta purpuralis* the sub-terminal line should be straight, fading away before reaching the costa (on *Pyrausta ostrinalis* the sub-terminal line is curved and meets the post-median line at the costa). **OTHER FEATURES:** When fresh, forewing upperside markings on *Pyrausta purpuralis* should comprise a more noticeable gold post-median line than on *Pyrausta aurata*, with further gold markings on the thorax spreading to the forewing basal area, but the amount of gold can vary considerably and fades with age. The underside of the abdomen should be noticeably purple. However, none of these other features is diagnostic, nor do they provide separation from *Pyrausta ostrinalis*.

CAUTION: In our region you can also come across *Pyrausta despicata*, which lacks any gold on the forewings, and *Pyrausta nigrata* on which the forewing ground colour is normally black with whiter markings.