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All Eyes on you! Butterflies of the Kruger National Park (KNP), South Africa

Herbert Otto

We as humans may only have two, but some butterflies have a lot more eyes than that - not only on their heads but on their wings too.

Naming butterflies and all other creatures is an art that comes from the 17th century following Carl Linne's system of categorising plants and animals. Later he also changed his own name to Carolus Linnaeus in keeping with this system.

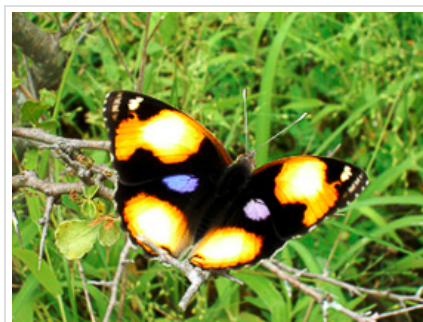
The butterfly genus *Junonia* is also known in vernacular English as Pansies. Where did the name come from? In Mythology the goddess Juno was known to possess a chariot that was drawn by peacocks. The peacock is known for the techni-coloured circular or eye-like pattern on the male's tail feathers. In this way the butterflies with many eyes or ocelli on their wings inherited the same scientific name as the peacock.

Two of the original *Junonia* species - the Blue and Yellow Pansies - have wing patterns and colours that closely resemble the flowers they are named for - the pansy; explaining their English name. The Blue Pansy, *Junonia oenone oenone* was also recorded once (presumably, an accidental introduction) from British shores.



The Blue Pansy female *Junonia oenone oenone* is a common sight in the KNP. The large eyes can clearly be seen.

Photo © Herbert Otto



The Yellow Pansy *Junonia hierta cebrene* male has no eyes or ocelli, but the pansy face is obvious.

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New evidence has come to light regarding the differentiation of the two genera, *Precis* and *Junonia*. Subsequently in Southern Africa, two other species have been added to the genus of *Junonia* as well; they are the Brown Pansy and the Soldier Pansy. Previously those were named *Commodores* and belonged to the genus *Precis* but new findings had them re-classified. The scientific name for the Brown Pansy is *Junonia natalica natalica* and the Soldier Pansy is *Junonia terea elgiva*. These two butterflies prefer the denser vegetation of the KNP found along waterways. The Soldier Pansy and Brown Pansy have sexes which display a very similar wing pattern design; with the female being slightly larger in size and also bearing a stouter abdomen.



The Brown Pansy *Junonia natalica natalica* prefers the shadows of riparian forest and woodland found along waterways in the KNP.

Photo © Herbert Otto



The Soldier Pansy *Junonia terea elgiva* displaying the eyes it was named for. The sexes of this species are similar.

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A fifth member to the genus *Junonia* is the Eyed Pansy, *Junonia orithya madagascariensis* with a striking iridescent blue on a black ground colour. The eyes are more prominently marked on the female of the species of the Yellow Pansy, Blue Pansy and Eyed Pansy. These enlarged eyes then assist to distinguish the females from the males in these three butterfly species; which prefer drier areas and can be seen throughout the KNP.



The Eyed Pansy *Junonia orithya madagascariensis* can be found in the more arid savanna areas.

Photo © Herbert Otto

As we can see on the heads of butterflies we find two compound eyes, but quite a few more eyes are visible on the wings of the species displayed. All the butterflies pictured here occur in the KNP.