



When is DOUBT, Try this OUT!

Woodpeckers



Set your device screen
to 100% brightness
before viewing the
species illustrations.

— by Dr Nikhil Bhopale —

A SERIES OF FIELD GUIDES OF CONFUSING SPECIES

When in
DOUBT,
Try this
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A SERIES OF FIELD GUIDES OF CONFUSING SPECIES

There is an old saying: “When in doubt, Leave it out!” Most birders do this while watching few confusing bird groups like waders, leaf warblers, larks, etc. But now... you don’t have to leave it out. Instead, you can just... Try It Out!!

The ‘**WHEN IN DOUBT; TRY THIS OUT**’ (WIDTTO) series is all about identification of similar-looking (hence, confusing) species.

Woodpeckers

This e-book is about a group called **Woodpeckers**. Some woodpeckers like the Heart-spotted Woodpecker, White-bellied Woodpecker, Great Slaty Woodpecker are very distinct and thus, easy to identify. However, some species from sub-groups like flamebacks, piers are similar-looking, hence birders find them confusing while identifying them on the field. If this is your problem too, this e-book is just what you need.

The publication showcases ‘seen-on-field’ pointers for identification of confusing woodpecker species. All identification pointers are presented in an easy-to-understand way thus, making this an **effective, quick-referencing tool** for the field.

So, head out to watch woodpeckers. Keep birding! :)

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Author's Note

Dear Birder,

This publication is thoughtfully created to simplify the identification of Woodpeckers. I sincerely hope that this helps you in species identification while you are on the field.

While identifying woodpeckers — or rather any species — remember that the process of identification should never rely solely on matching the visible traits to what is described in a field guide. It is equally important to confirm that your species does NOT have all traits of any other species. Rather, **THAT'S** what is more important — being sure it is NOT any other species.

One effective approach in species identification is what I call, the '**PoE**' Method — the **Process of Elimination**. By following a simple flowchart, you can systematically rule out species, step-by-step, thus, narrowing down your possibilities, and finally... arriving at the species name. The **PoE**, by definition, means that you keep eliminating non-suitable options till the time you are left with *just* one option ... and, Bingo!!! ... **THAT'S** the species you have been trying to identify. So, by practicing this method, you'll make informed judgements and will end up identifying species more confidently than ever before. **So, how should you start?**

- 1) **Check page 5: What are Woodpeckers?** You must start by getting a quick understanding of woodpeckers, as a group.
- 2) **Check out pages 6-7-8: Illustrated Glossary** Observe the illustrated glossary and thoroughly understand the meaning of each term. You ought to be familiar with these terms before looking for woodpeckers.

**GREEN
WORKS
TRUST**

For a greener and sustainable future

I would love to hear back from you about this publication. Your suggestions and experiences of using this on the field are valuable. I am all ears:)

Keep 'pecking' from this e-book. Send me your 'woodpeckering' experiences. Write to me on gwnikhil@gmail.com or whatsapp me on 98193 30222.



Always set your device screen to 100% brightness before viewing the species illustrations.



3) **Check out page 9: Flowchart** The flowchart will guide you through the identification process, step-by-step. At first, it will help you narrow-down till the sub-group level. This is level 1. This is the first and the most important step in starting the **PoE**. Each level will give you descriptive options. Then, all you need to do is make the right choices through the flowchart, by eliminating the ones that don't match your woodpecker. Level-by-level you will be guided to a page which finally has two or three likely suspects (species) which are a close match to your woodpecker. Then, read all pointers on that page which will further help you identify the Woodpecker to its species level. It's **DONE!**

Caution! In nature, variations are common and appearances can be deceiving. This is why 'revalidation' is important. So while choosing the 'right' option, it is equally important to keep eliminating the wrong ones. Make sure you do this during **PoE** to reassure yourself that your chosen option is indeed the 'right' one.

Above all, remember... **GO SLOW! Slow is steady; hurry is worry.**

There is no race or competition in birdwatching. Take your time.

If you are unable to identify a species — whether due to limited observations, unclear markings, or any other possible reason — that's perfectly fine. Birding is as much about the joy of being in nature as it is about naming the bird.

So, stay calm, stay focused, and you will be able to fully appreciate the many delights that come along with time spent outdoors.

yours,
Nikhil Bhopale





What are woodpeckers?

You will be able to identify species of woodpeckers using this WIDTTO field guide.

But hey, first make sure that the bird you are watching is a 'woodpecker'. Once you are sure that it is indeed, a woodpecker, then you can use this field guide to identify the species.

So, to begin with... how do you know it is a woodpecker?

**Read on to know
about woodpeckers...**

Physical Adaptations

1. Clinging Ability: Cling to vertical surfaces with support of rigid tail.
2. Feeding Posture: Able to hang on branches and feed seamlessly.
3. Bill Shape: Strong bill base and pointed tip (tapering bill).

Habitat and Behaviour

1. Forest-dwellers: Most woodpeckers are forest birds.
2. Flight Pattern: Deep undulating flight.
3. Terrestrial Feeders: Few woodpeckers (e.g. *Picus* genus) feed on the ground (ants and termites' mounds).

Sexual Dimorphism

1. Male Characteristics: Males generally have red on the head.
2. Female Characteristics: Red colouration is reduced or absent in females.

Movement and Sounds

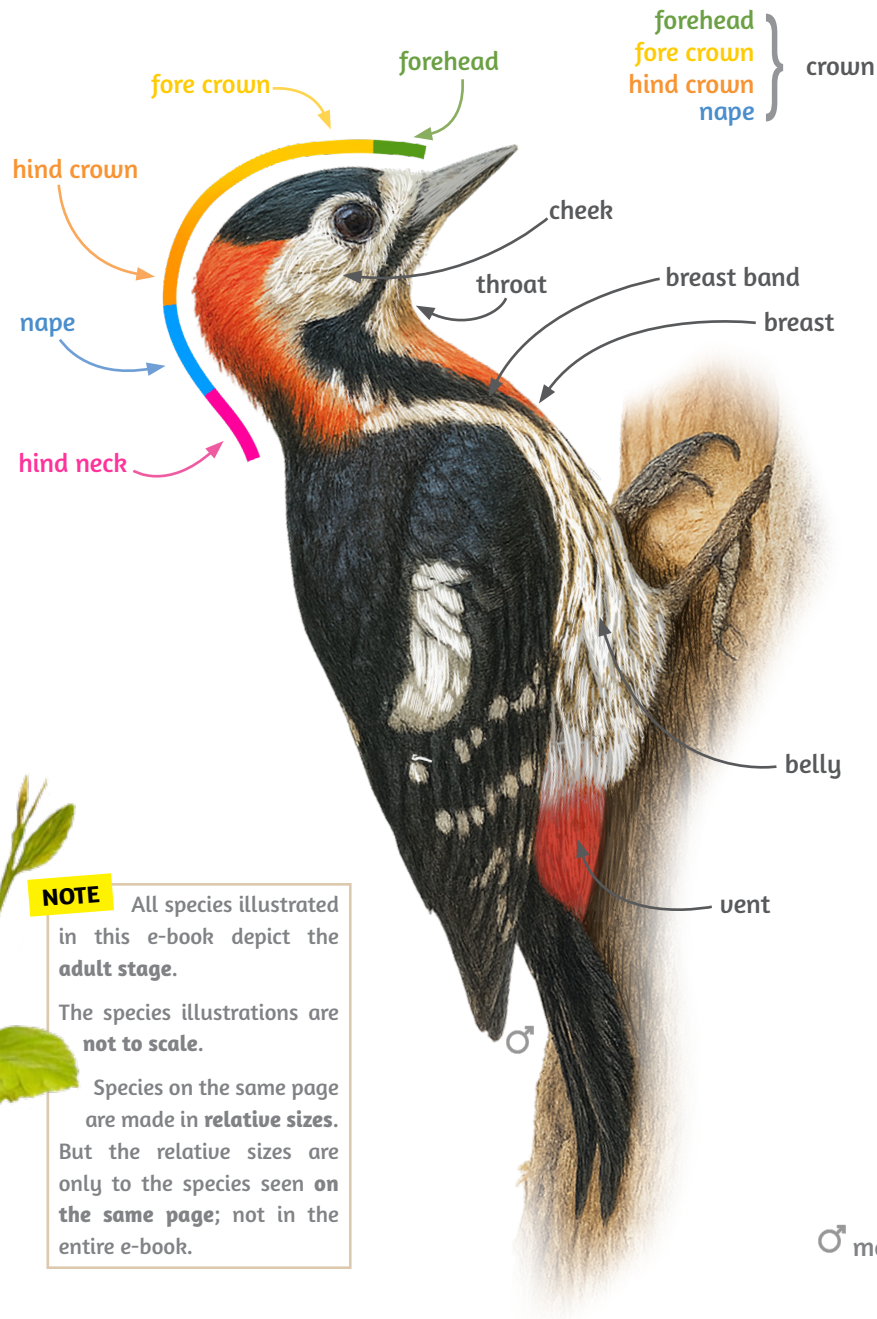
1. Locomotion: Woodpeckers hop rather than walk.
2. Vocalisations: Various sounds, including loud, peevish, metallic, cackling, and nasal notes.
3. Drumming: Rhythmic drumming (pecking sound) for territorial advertisement.

Nesting and Foraging

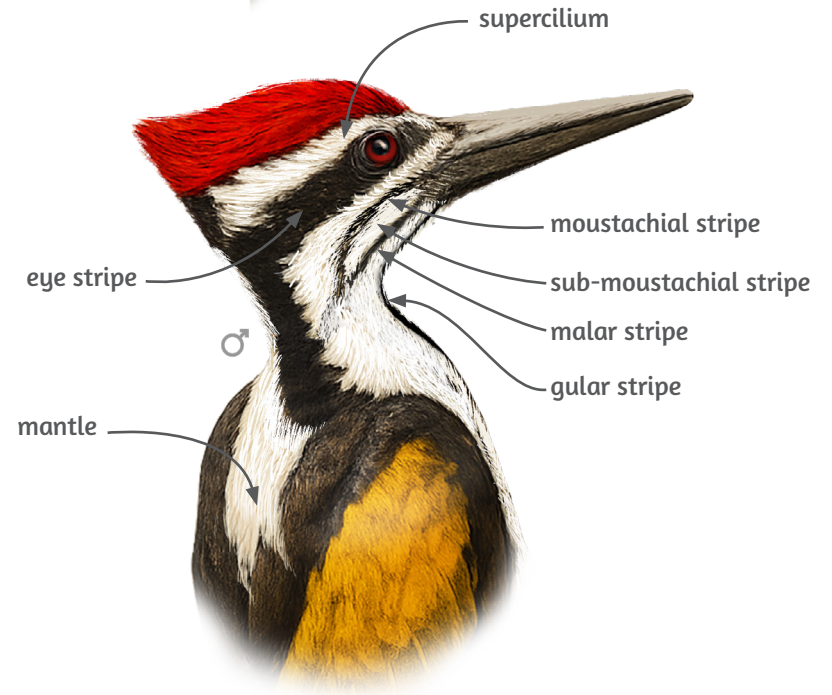
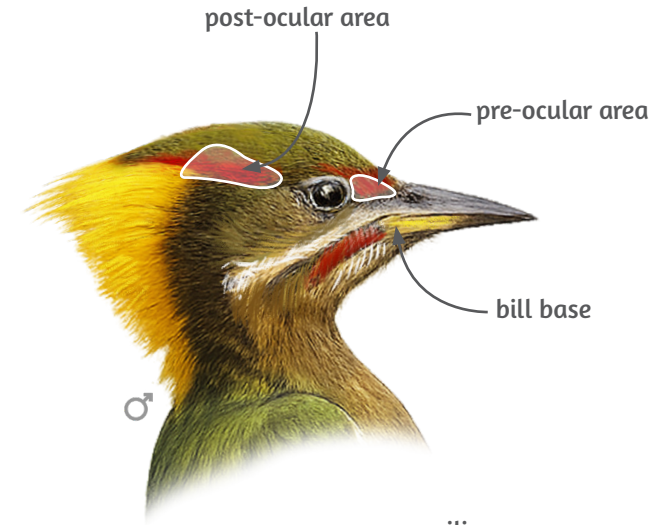
1. Tree Excavation: Make holes in live and dead trees for feeding and nesting.

Illustrated glossary

Here are a few **terms** that you must know before looking for woodpeckers.



NOTE All species illustrated in this e-book depict the **adult stage**.
The species illustrations are **not to scale**.
Species on the same page are made in **relative sizes**.
But the relative sizes are only to the species seen **on the same page**; not in the entire e-book.



♂ male ♀ female ♀ applicable to both, male and female

Illustrated glossary

Take a look at these **patterns** and what they are called. You'll have to know them while describing or reading about woodpeckers.



scaly



streaks



streaks



barring



big white patch



spots



spots



chain-spotting



distinct



indistinct



smudged (eg: brown patch)

Illustrated glossary

Take a look at the **regions of India** from where woodpeckers showcased in this e-book are found.

Jaisalmer, Rajasthan

Himalay

Northeast India

Satpuda and Vindhya
hill ranges

Eastern Ghats

Andaman and
Nicobar Islands

Western Ghats

NOTE All species included in this e-book are species that are found in India and their distribution **only from India** is given in this e-book.



National and State boundaries of India
taken from mapchart.net

Clickable Flowchart

You are watching a woodpecker on the field. Now follow this flowchart to use the **PoE** method. First of all, observe the colour of the upperparts of the woodpecker. Are they **reddish-brown**? Are they **green**? Are they **yellow-orange**? Or are the upperparts **black-and-white**?

LEVEL 1



REDDISH BROWN

Click here
(to page 10)



GREEN



YELLOW-ORANGE



BLACK-AND-WHITE

LEVEL 2

If the back of the head is **yellow**,
[click here](#) (to page 11).

If the back of the head is **not yellow**,
[click here](#) (to page 12).

If the woodpecker has **no moustachial stripe**,
[click here](#) (to page 13).

If **one moustachial stripe** is seen;
[click here](#) (to page 13).

If **two moustachial stripes** are seen;
[click here](#) (to page 14).

Only white spots are seen on the woodpecker...

Big white patch & white spots are seen on the woodpecker...

LEVEL 3

If the crown is **multicoloured**,
[click here](#) (to page 15).

If the crown is **unicoloured**,
[click here](#) (to page 16).

If the belly is **plain**, [click here](#) (to page 17).

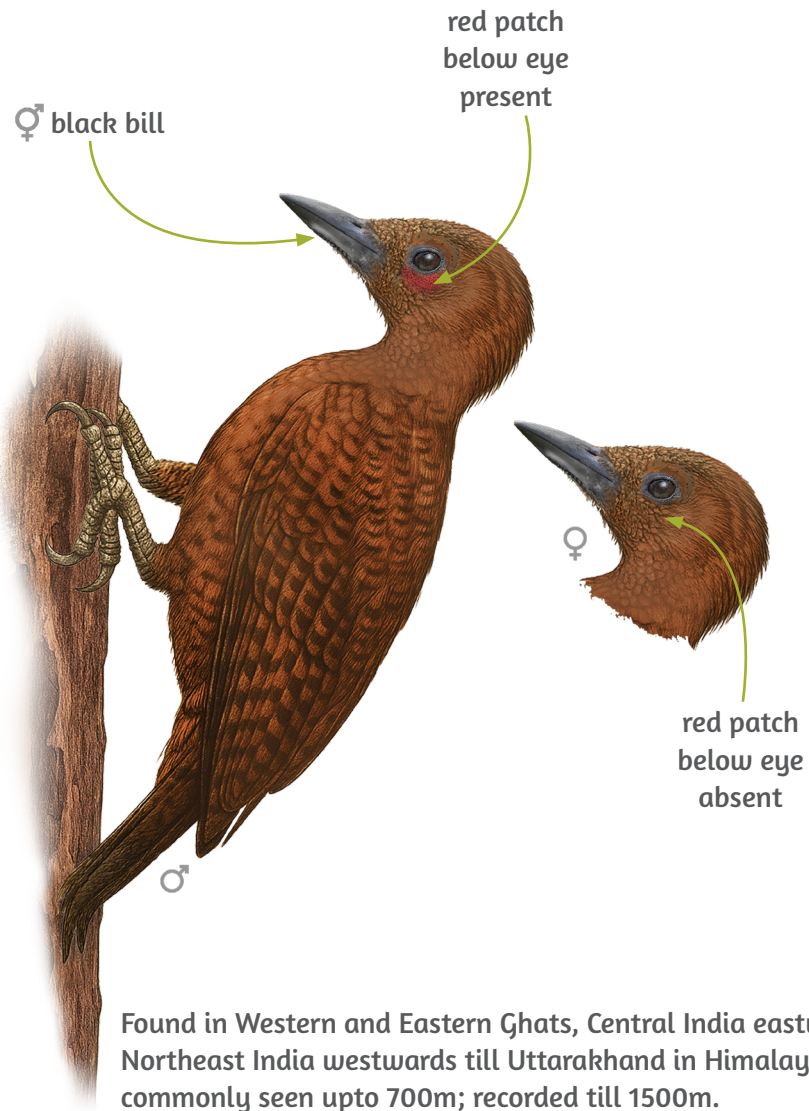
If the belly is **patterned**, [click here](#) (to page 18).

Got stuck during PoE?
Read this >>

During the **PoE**, (1) If in level 3 of black-and-white woodpeckers, you are unable to decide if the crown is 'multicoloured' or 'unicoloured', then turn to pages 15 and 16, and consider all species on both the pages as your suspects. Read all pointers carefully and then you'll be able to identify the species. (2) If in level 3, you choose 'belly is patterned' and turn to page 18, but... none of species on that page match the woodpecker you have seen, then possibly you misidentified the 'patterned' belly. In such a case, go to page 17 and consider the species with 'plain' belly. If those species also don't match, you need to jump back to the earlier level, ie level 2 and reconsider the options. (3) There is also a possibility that the woodpecker you are watching is not confusing (like the Heart-spotted Woodpecker), hence it is not included in the species pages of this flowchart.

Rufous Woodpecker

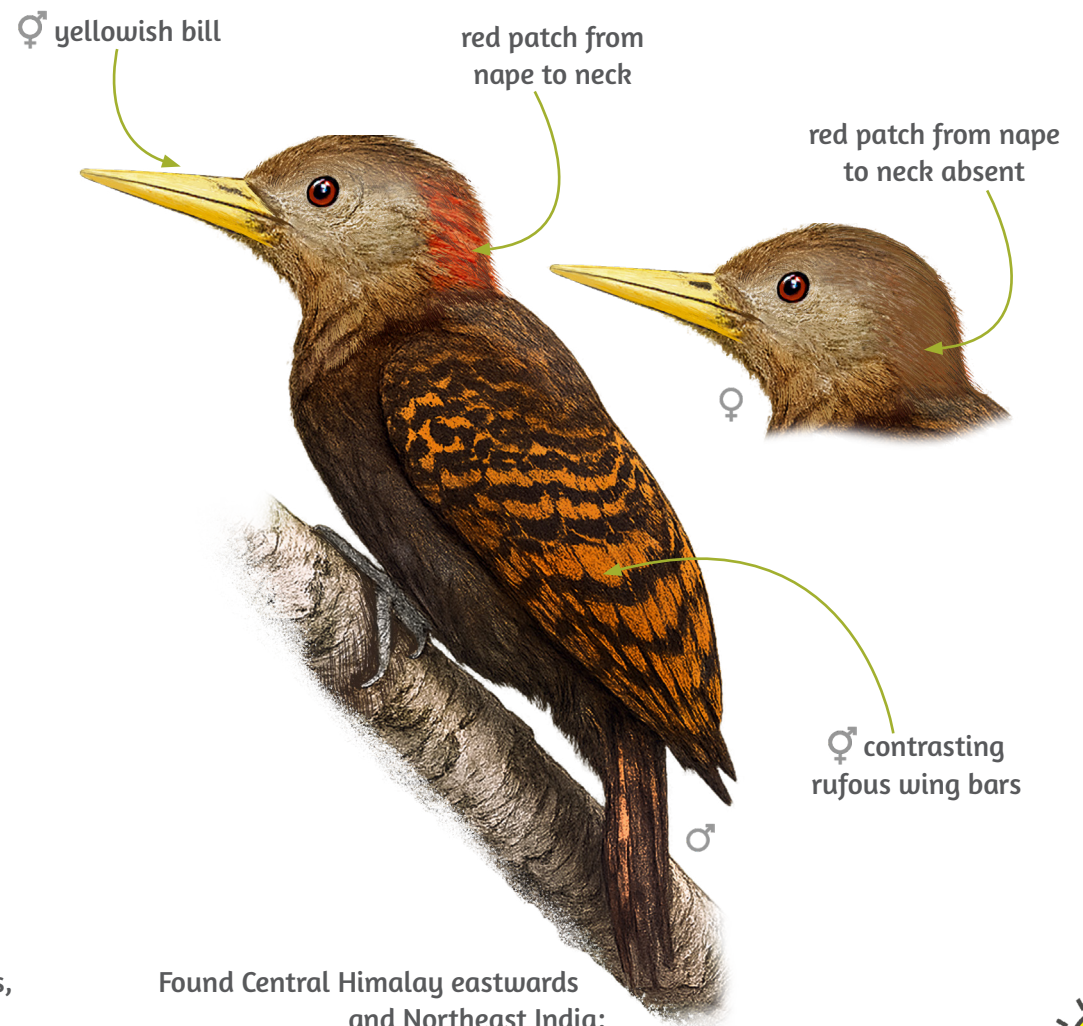
Micropternus brachyurus



Found in Western and Eastern Ghats, Central India eastwards, Northeast India westwards till Uttarakhand in Himalay; commonly seen upto 700m; recorded till 1500m.

Bay Woodpecker

Blythipicus pyrrhotis



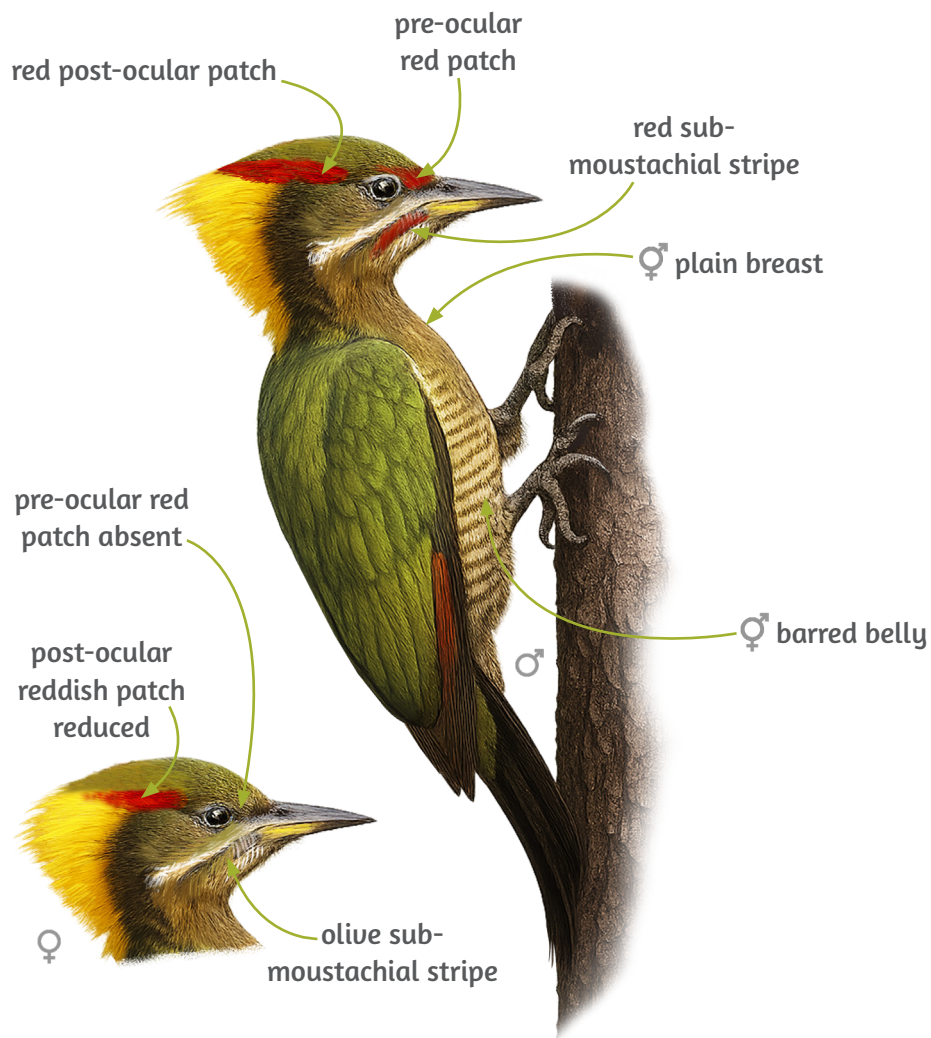
Found Central Himalay eastwards and Northeast India; seen from plains to 2500m.



>> with yellow on back of head

Lesser Yellownape

Picus chlorolophus

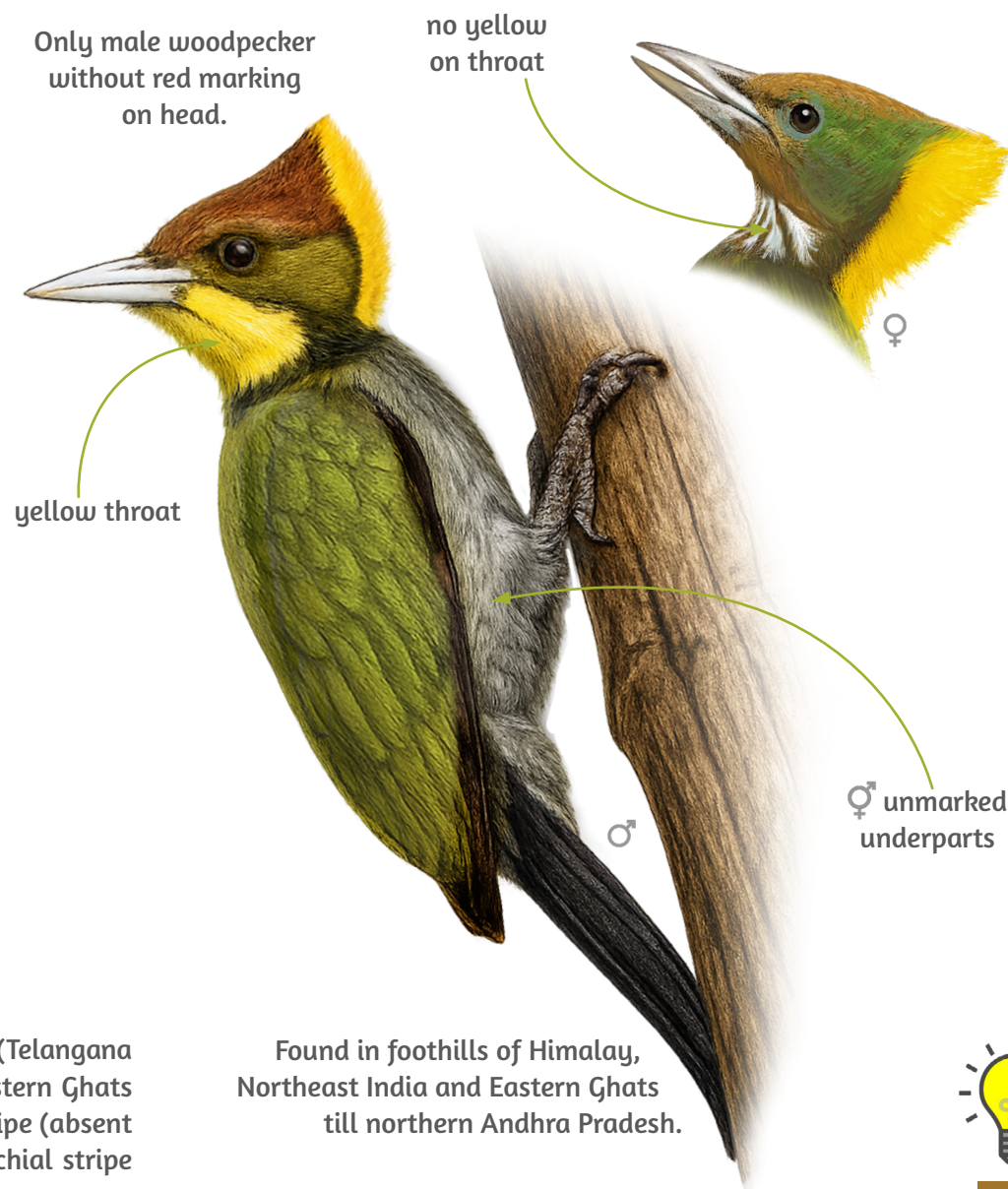


The above illustration depicts a sub-species which is found in Himalay, Eastern Ghats (Telangana northwards) and Northeast India. The sub-species from Western Ghats, south Eastern Ghats and Satpuda hill ranges has red crown (absent in females), red sub-moustachial stripe (absent in females), smaller bill, short crest, narrow yellow nape, reduced white moustachial stripe and white above eye, white spots on underparts or may appear plain.

>> with yellow on back of head

Greater Yellownape

Chrysophlegma flavinucha



Found in foothills of Himalay, Northeast India and Eastern Ghats till northern Andhra Pradesh.

<< back to flowchart



>> without yellow on back of head

Streak-throated Woodpecker

Picus xanthopygaeus

>> without yellow on back of head

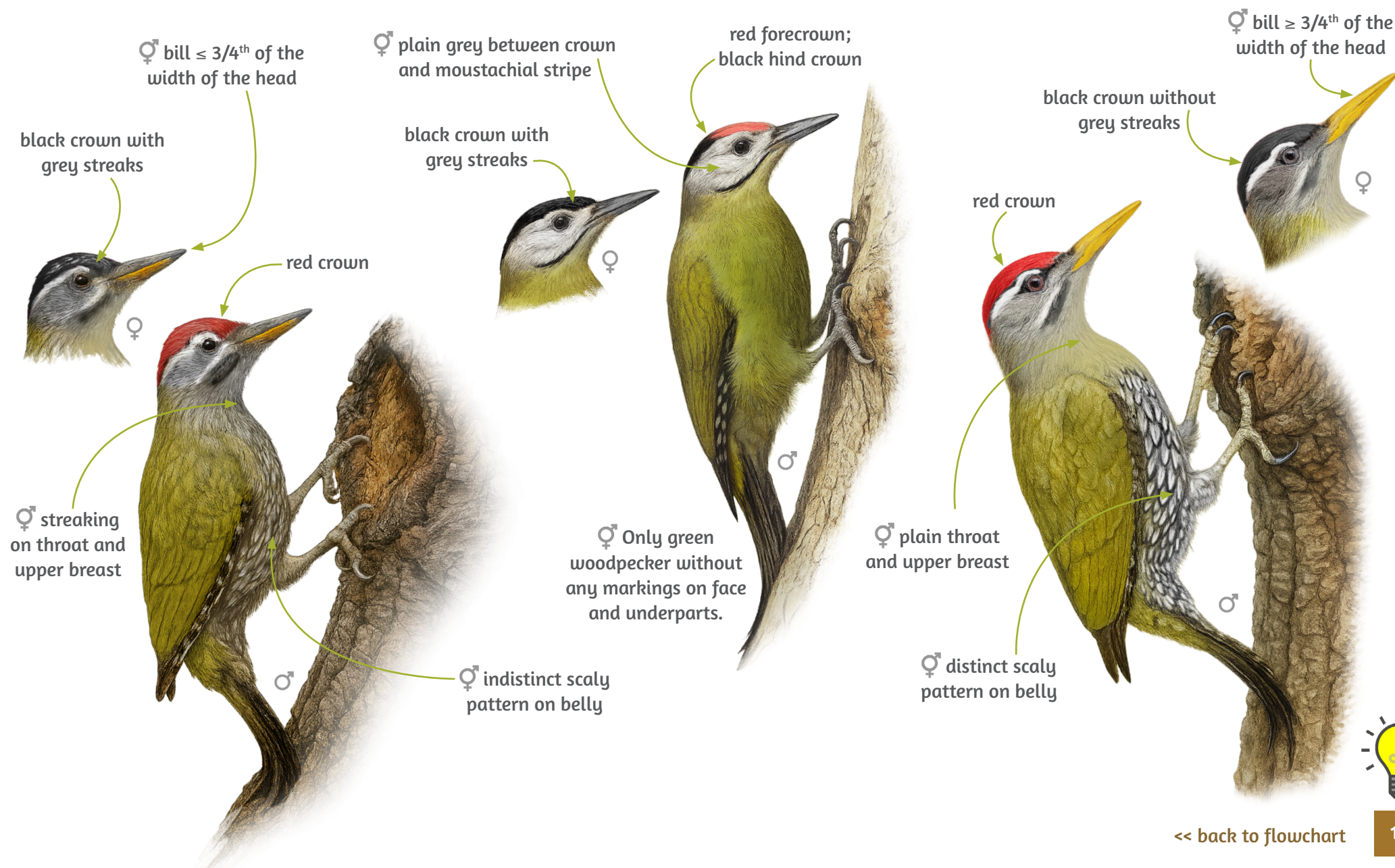
Grey-headed Woodpecker

Picus canus

>> without yellow on back of head

Scaly-bellied Woodpecker

Picus squamatus

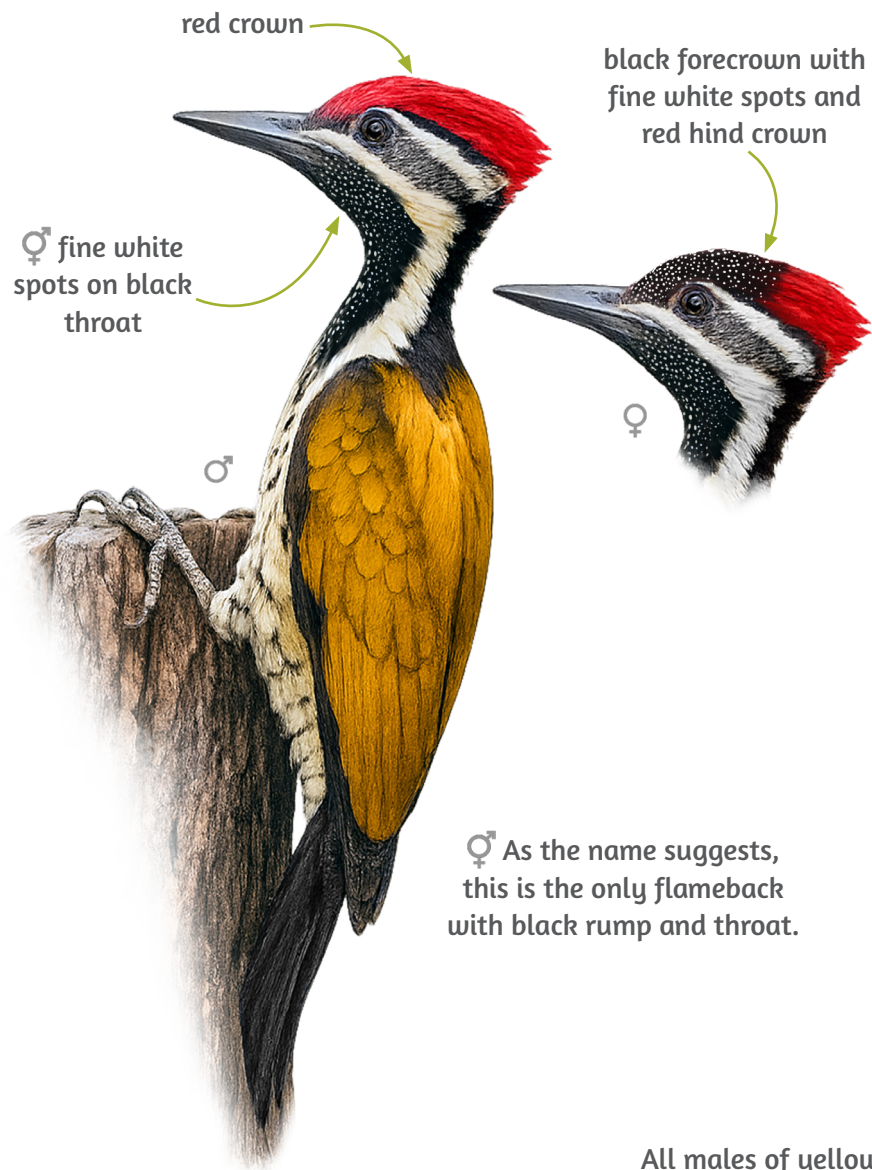


<< back to flowchart

>> no moustachial stripe

Black-rumped Flameback

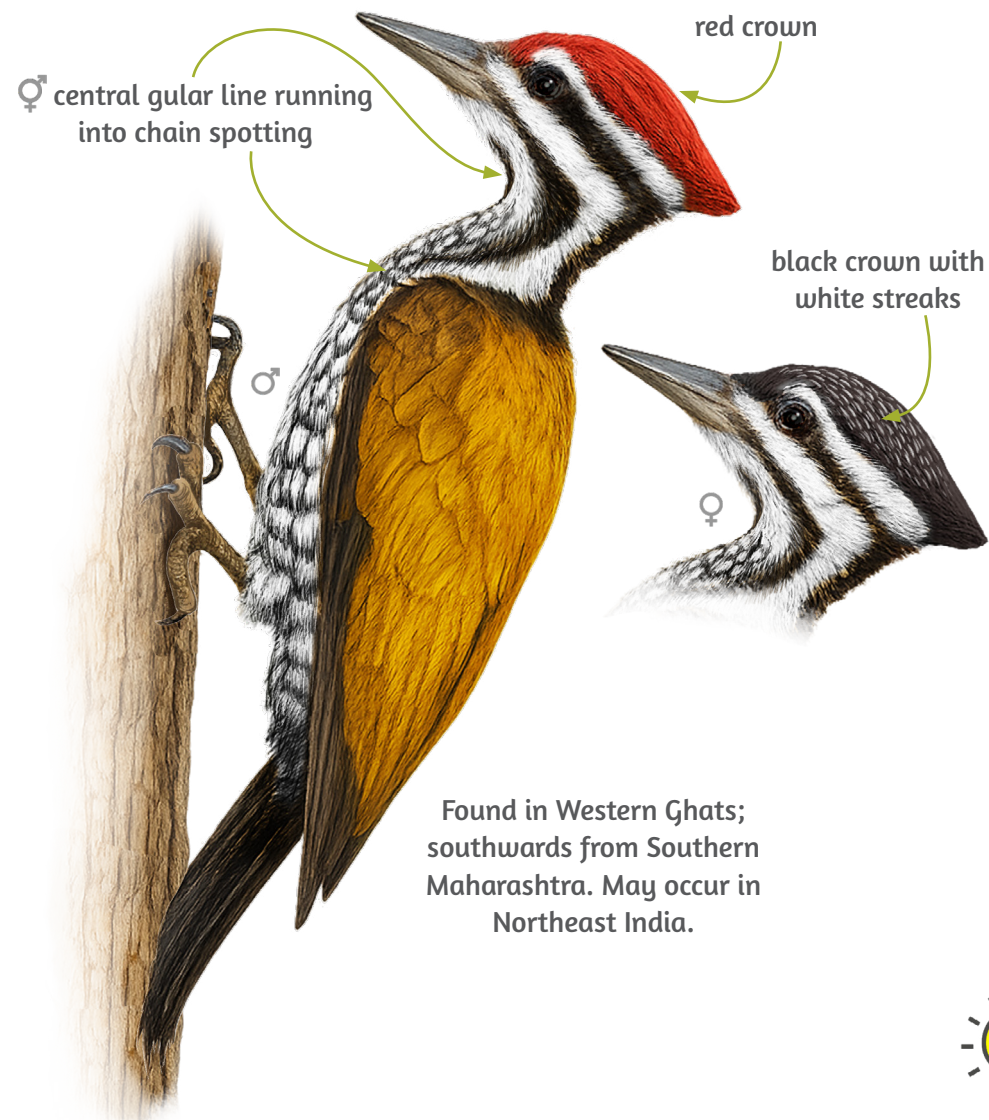
Dinopium benghalense



>> one moustachial stripe

Common Flameback

Dinopium javanense



All males of yellow-orange woodpeckers have a red crown.

<< back to flowchart



>> two moustachial stripes

Himalayan Flameback

Dinopium shorii

>> two moustachial stripes

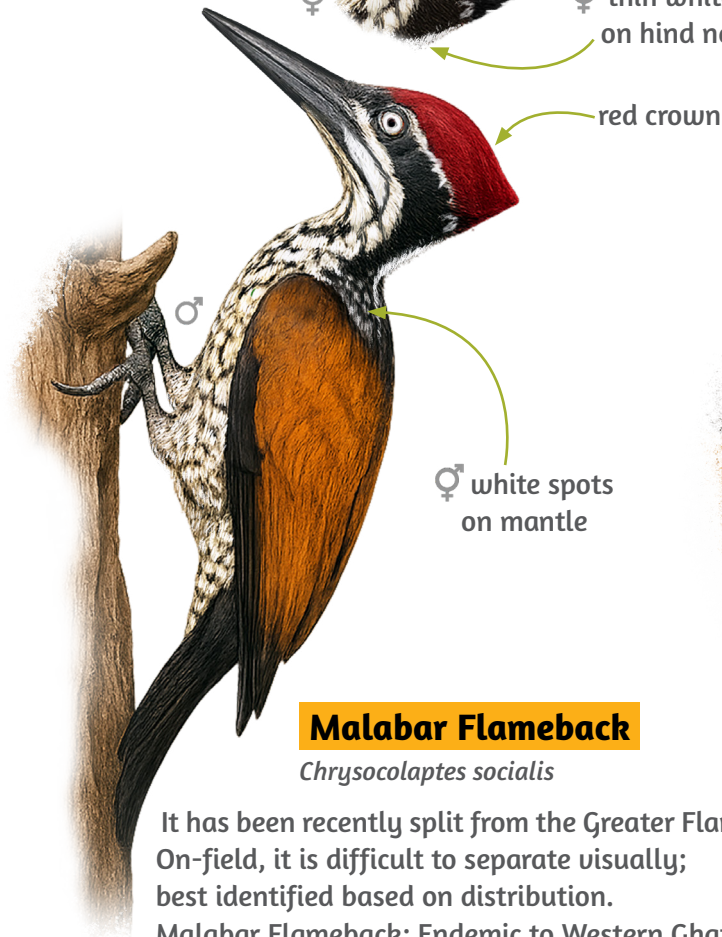
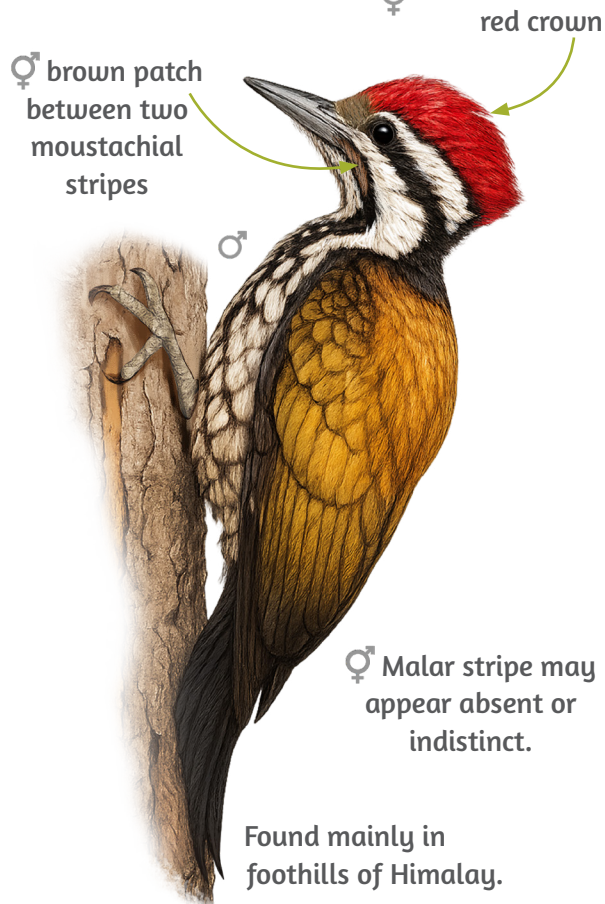
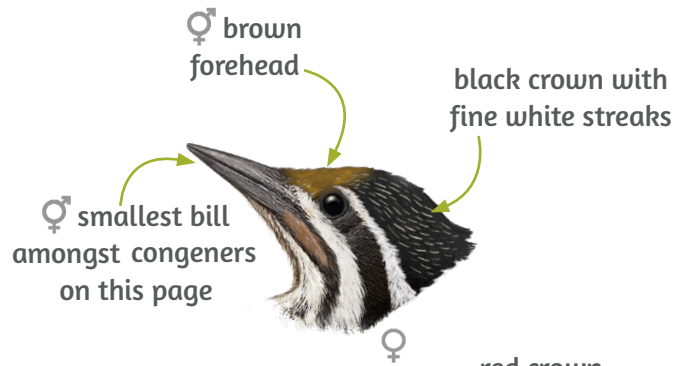
Greater Flameback

Chrysocolaptes guttacristatus

>> two moustachial stripes

White-naped Woodpecker

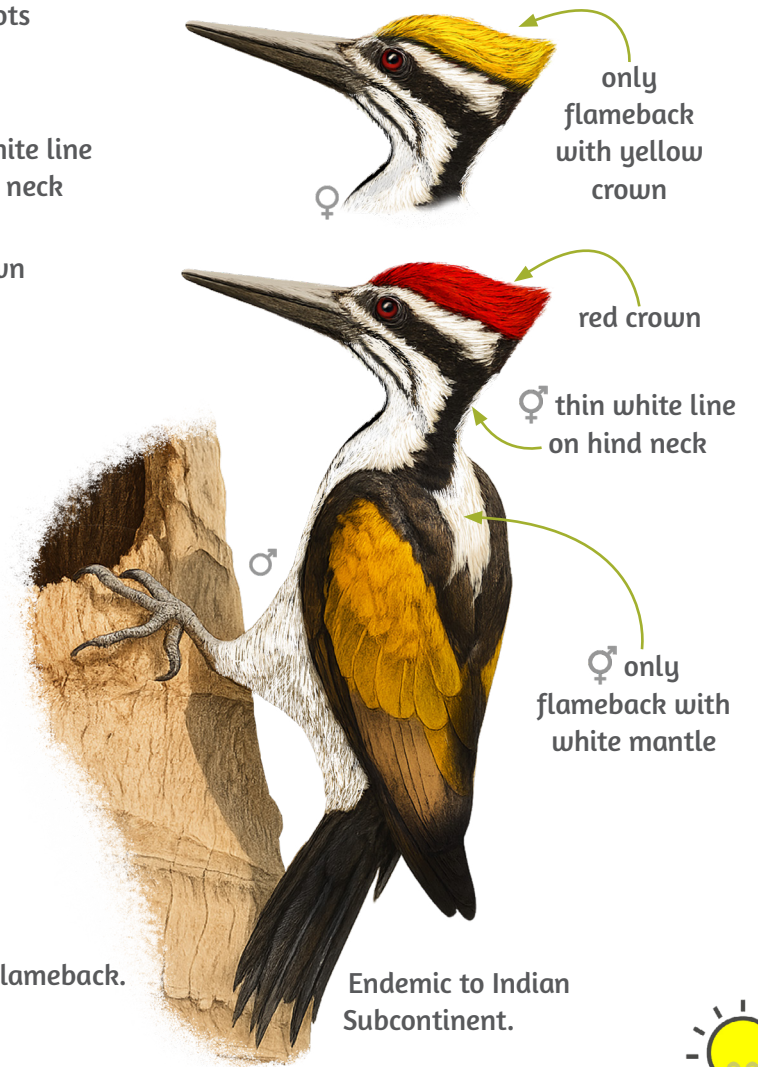
Chrysocolaptes festivus



Malabar Flameback

Chrysocolaptes socialis

It has been recently split from the Greater Flameback. On-field, it is difficult to separate visually; best identified based on distribution.
Malabar Flameback: Endemic to Western Ghats.
Greater Flameback: Himalay, Northeast India, Eastern Ghats (till north Andhra Pradesh).



Endemic to Indian Subcontinent.

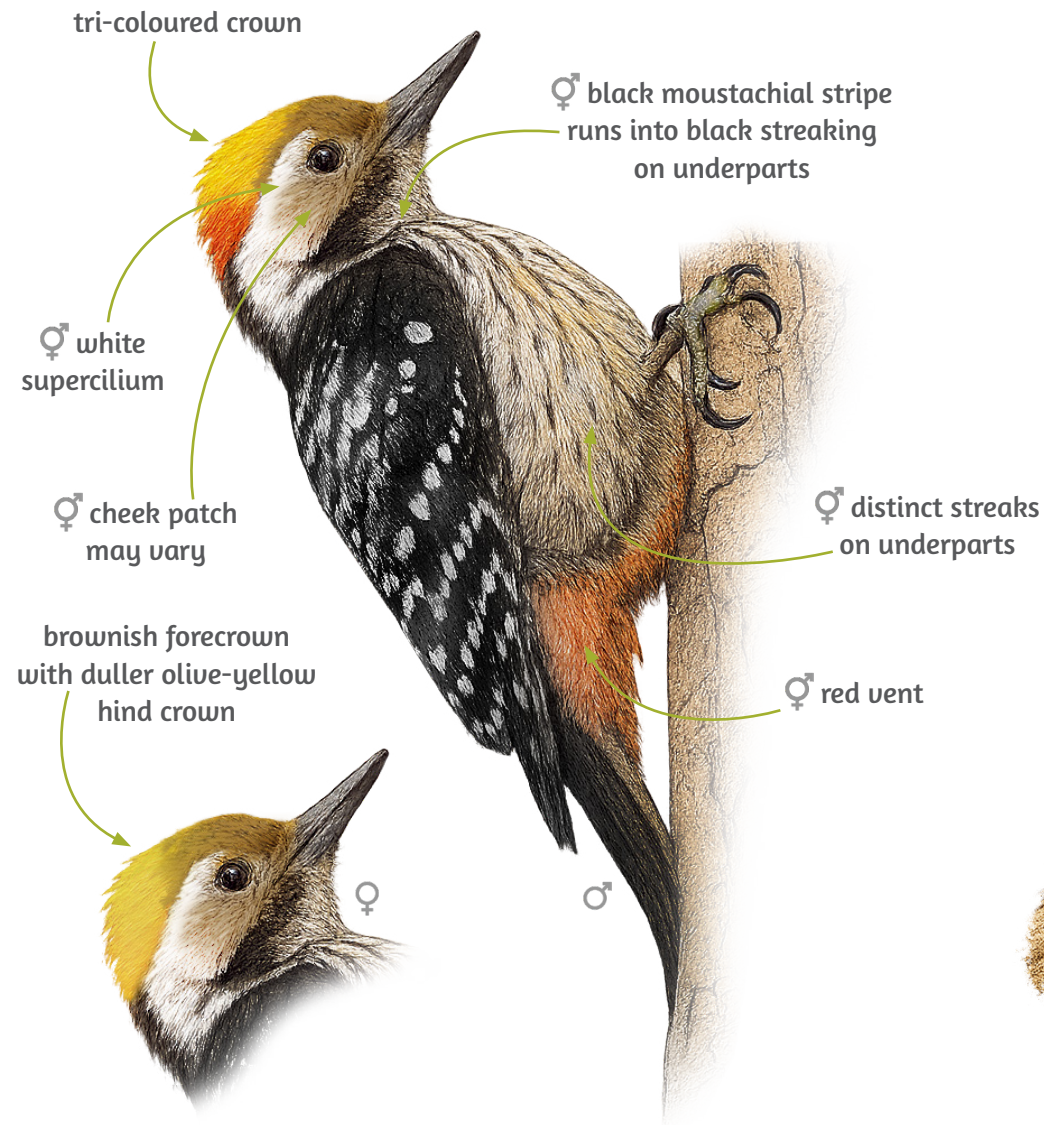
<< back to flowchart



>> only white spots >> multicoloured crown

Brown-fronted Woodpecker

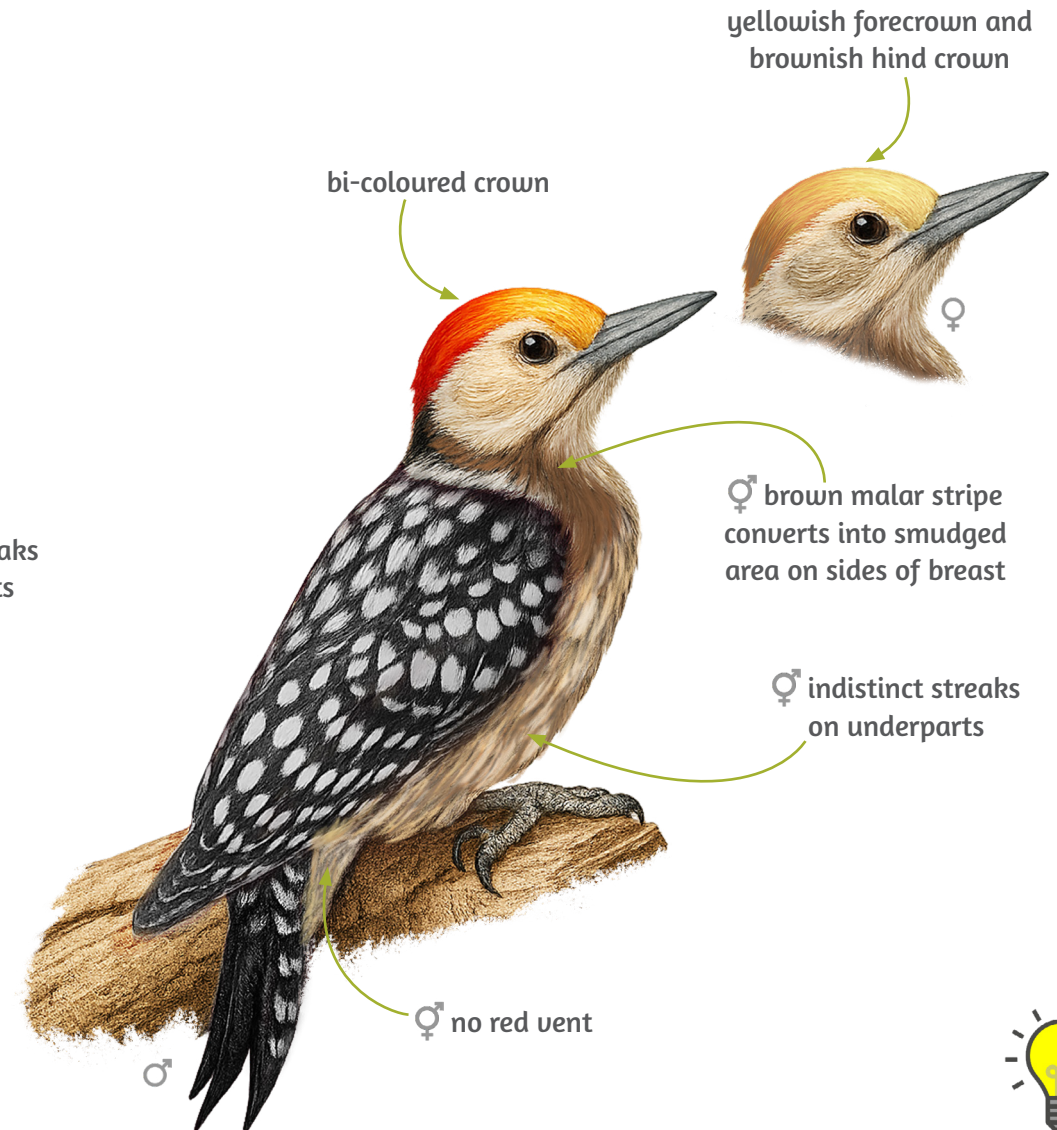
Dendrocytes auriceps



>> only white spots >> multicoloured crown

Yellow-crowned Woodpecker

Leiopicus mahrattensis



<< back to flowchart

>> only white spots >> unicoloured crown

Stripe-breasted Woodpecker

Dendrocopos atratus

>> only white spots >> unicoloured crown

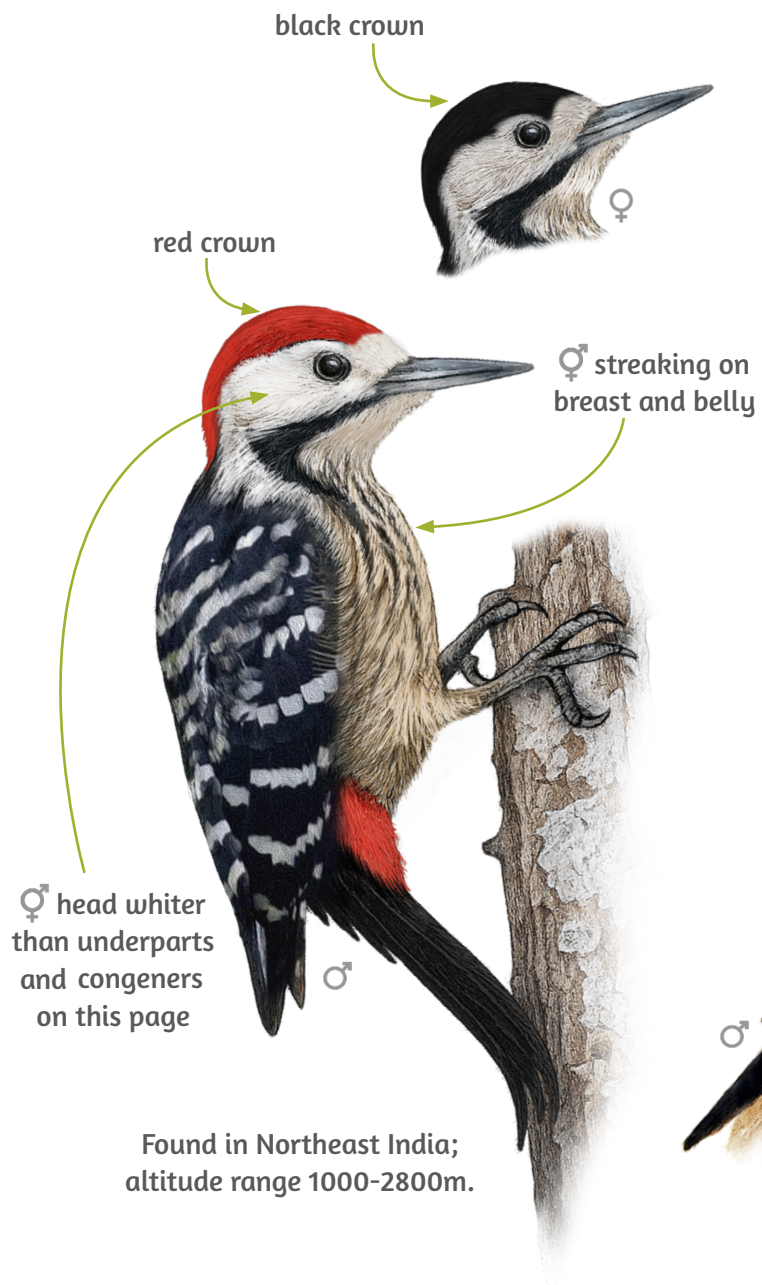
Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker

Dendrocopos macei

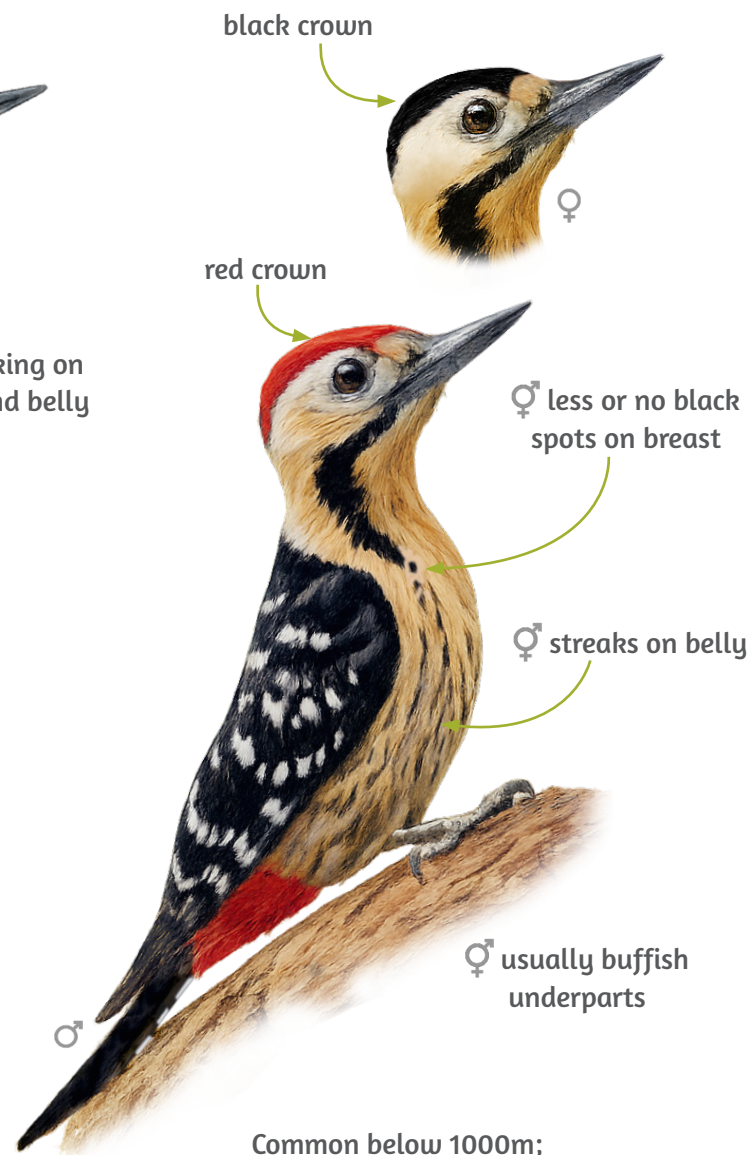
>> only white spots >> unicoloured crown

Freckle-breasted Woodpecker

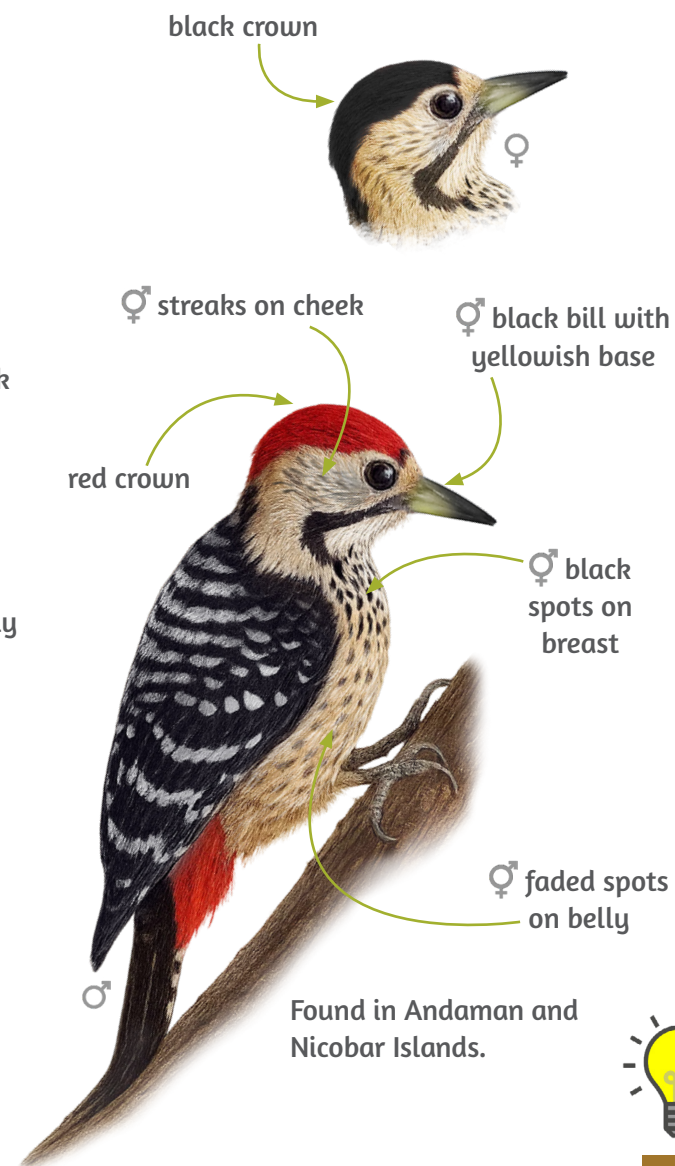
Dendrocopos analis



Found in Northeast India;
altitude range 1000-2800m.



Common below 1000m;
recorded till 1800m.



Found in Andaman and
Nicobar Islands.

<< back to flowchart



>> big white patch & white spots >> plain belly

Himalayan Woodpecker

Dendrocopos himalayensis

>> big white patch & white spots >> plain belly

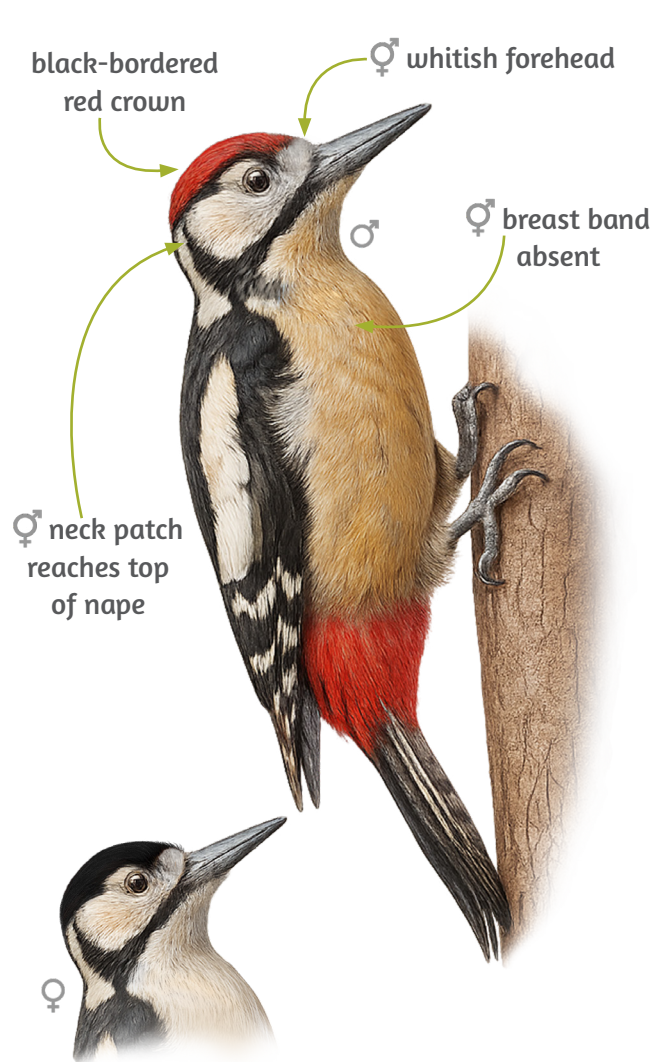
Sind Woodpecker

Dendrocopos assimilis

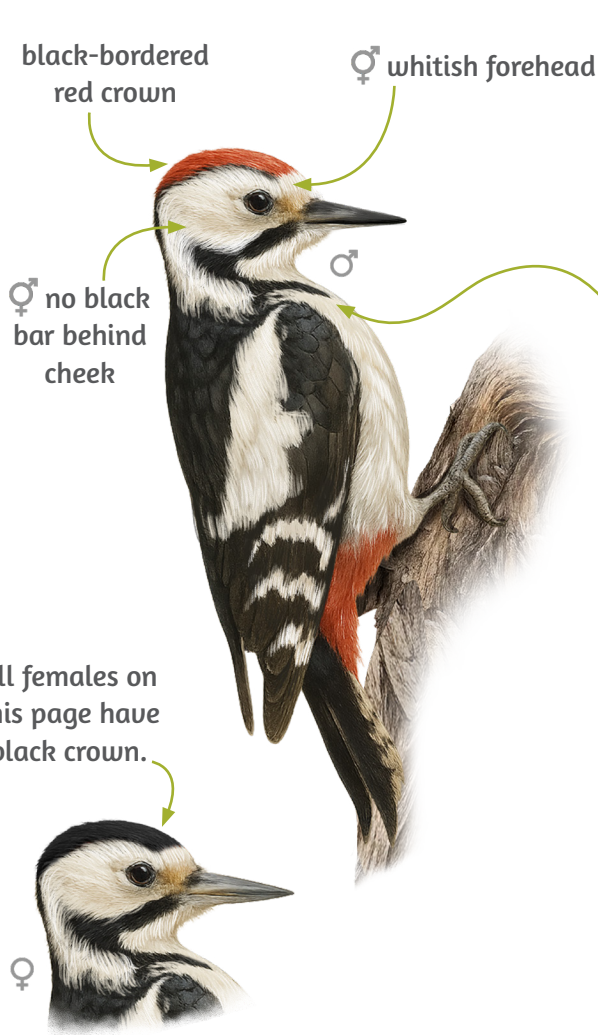
>> big white patch & white spots >> plain belly

Great Spotted Woodpecker

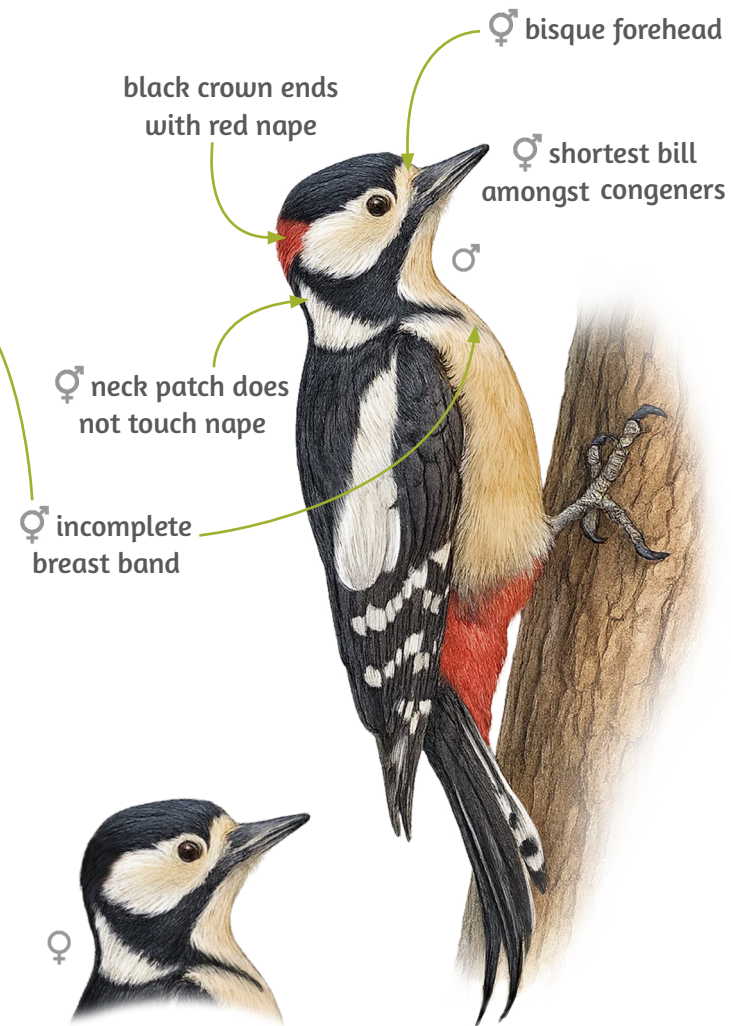
Dendrocopos major



The sub-species which is found in Jammu and Kashmir to west Himachal has much whiter underparts.



Recorded near Jaisalmer (Rajasthan) only.



Known only from Myanmar border states.



>> big white patch & white spots >> patterned belly

Darjeeling Woodpecker

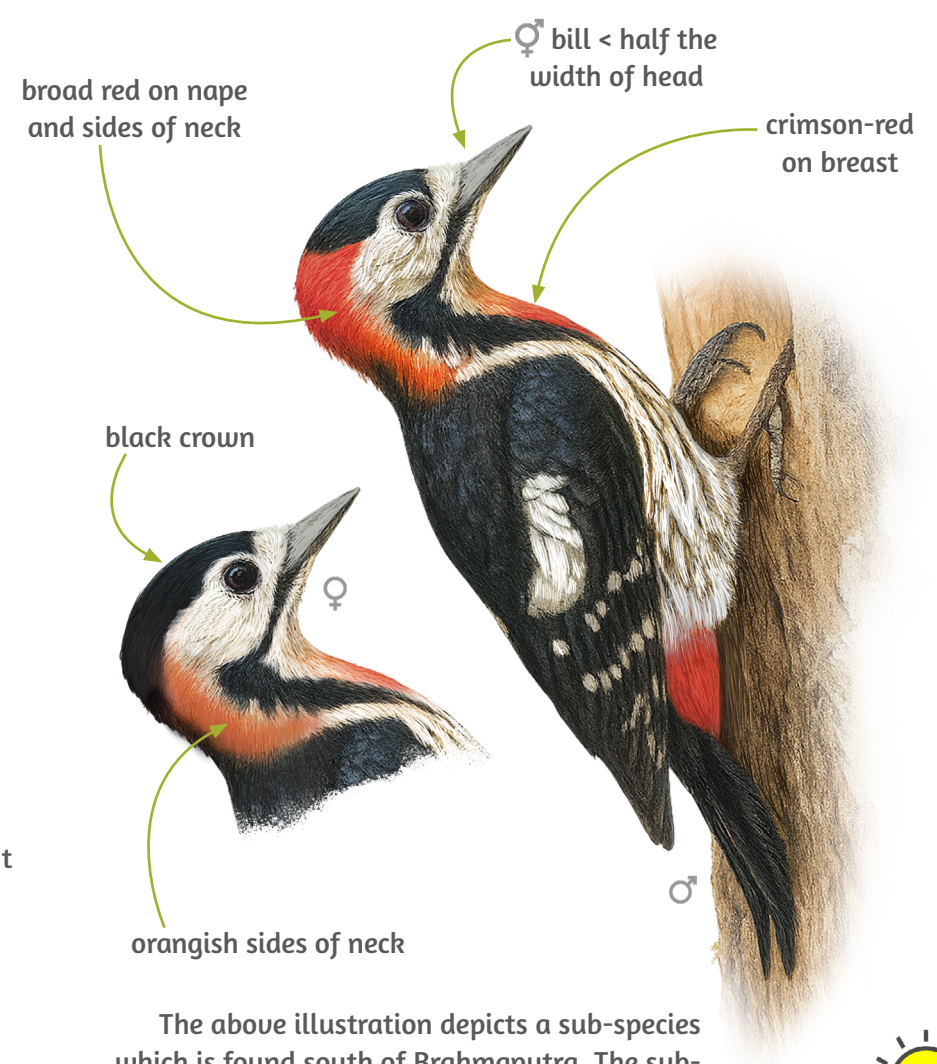
Dendrocopos darjellensis



>> big white patch & white spots >> patterned belly

Crimson-naped Woodpecker

Dryobates cathpharius



The above illustration depicts a sub-species which is found south of Brahmaputra. The sub-species found in the north of Brahmaputra has indistinct red streaking on vent.



<< back to flowchart

When in DOUBT, Try this OUT!



‘When In Doubt, Try This Out! – Woodpeckers’

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