

# GREAT SLATY WOODPECKER

A record of *Mulleripicus pulverulentus* (Aves: Piciformes: Picidae) in Kapilvastu, Nepal



**IUCN Red List:**  
Vulnerable  
(BirdLife  
International,  
2016)

*Mulleripicus pulverulentus* (Great Slaty Woodpecker)

**Aves**  
[Class of Birds]

**Piciformes**  
[Order of Nonpasserine  
birds]

**Picidae**  
[Family of Woodpeckers,  
Piculets and Wrynecks]

***Mulleripicus  
pulverulentus***  
[Great Slaty Woodpecker]

Species described by  
Temminck in 1826

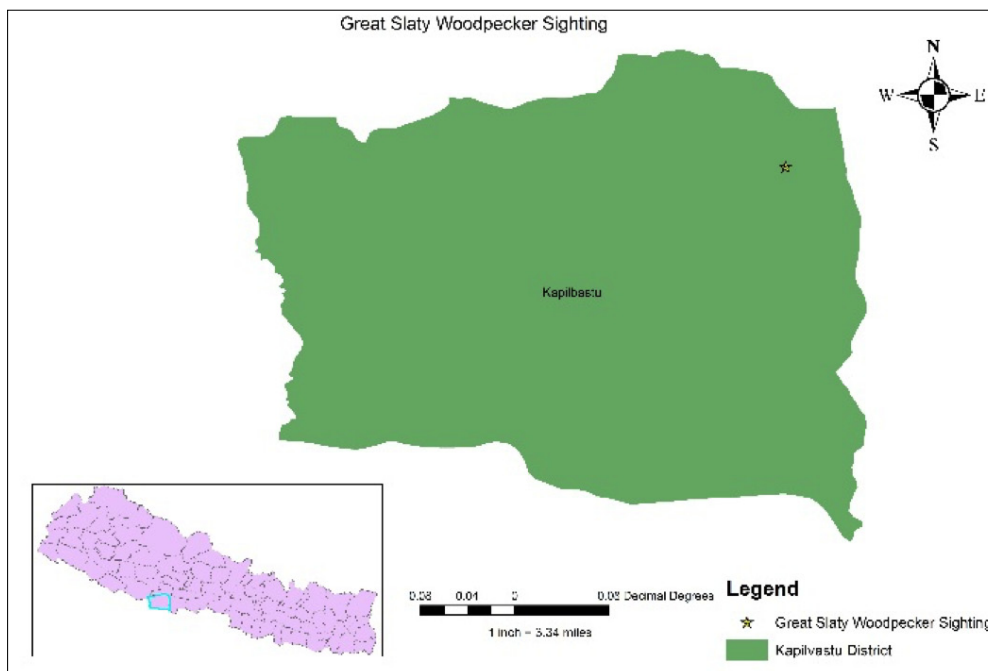
While conducting a regular bird watching programme on 3 June 2017 at 15:30hrs, we heard a distinct and loud bird sound. On further checking the forest areas we observed as many as eight Great Slaty Woodpeckers *Mulleripicus pulverulentus* in Navaprabhat Community Forest (27°44'N & 83°09'E), Banganga, Kapilvastu, Nepal. These birds were seen on the branches of a Sal *Shorea robusta* tree. The forest lies north to the East-West highway in the district. The site is *Shorea robusta* and *Terminalia elliptica* dominated forest. The birds were recorded using photographs and a video using Canon Powershot SX60 HS while calls were recorded using a smartphone.

The species is recorded from Bardiya, Suklaphanta, Banke and Chitwan National Park (Inskipp et al. 2016). Outside

the protected areas system, it has been recorded in Dang Deukhuri Important Bird Area, Dang District in June 2009 (Thakuri 2009a,b; 2010); in Tikapur Forest Park, Kailali District (unprotected) in September 2009 (Hem Sagar Baral in Inskipp et al. 2016), and near Dhanghadi, Kailali District in 2012 (Read 2012). An unusually large flock of 23 were seen at Beldandi, Kanchanpur District in April 2003 (Hem Subedi in personal communication with Inskipp et al. 2016). A population survey of the species carried out by the Nepalese Ornithological Union in 2011 also found the species at Tamaspur, Nawalparasi District (Baral 2011). There is a historical record of the Great Slaty Woodpecker in Rupandehi District (Rand & Fleming 1957), however there have been no further records from this district (Inskipp et al. 2016). Forest surveys in Kapilvastu District failed to record the presence of the species, although the habitat was considered favourable for it (Baral 2011).

**Global Distribution:**  
Native: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Thailand, Viet Nam (BirdLife International, 2016)

On 15 July 2016, 22 Great Slaty Woodpeckers were recorded along with a nest in Simalpani forest in Arghakhanchi District that borders Kapilvastu (Dinesh Giri pers. comm. 2016), however, no further sightings have been recorded at this locality till now.



Map showing the recent sighting of Great Slaty Woodpecker in Kapilvastu

Kapilvastu is located in the lowlands of the Western region of Nepal. A total of 86.85% area of the district is covered by the lower subtropical region and 12% and 1.2% respectively are covered by the upper tropical and subtropical regions. The forests of Kapilvastu include *Shorea robusta*, *Senegalia catechu* and *Dalbergia sissoo* as major forest types associated with *Terminalia tomentosa*, *Terminalia belerica*, etc. Moist deciduous forests with mature Sal trees constitute a suitable habitat for the Great Slaty Woodpecker (Ali & Ripley 1983). This is probably the reason for its occurrence there.

The Great Slaty Woodpecker (Family Picidae) is probably the largest living Picid in the world (Gorman 2014). It is associated with the old growth forest with mature Sal vegetation (Lammertink 2004). In Nepal it is a rare and local resident, mainly occurring within the protected areas system (Inskipp et al. 2016). It is listed as a globally Vulnerable species (BirdLife International 2016) and as Endangered in the Nepal bird National Red List (Inskipp et al. 2016).

The presence of the largest living woodpecker in the forests of Kapilvastu where conservation actions are not effective enough, illustrates the needs for conservation activities outside the protected area system in Nepal. Jagdishpur reservoir lies in southern part of Kapilvastu where conservation activities were conducted but are mainly focused on the conservation of farmland & wetland birds. But the northern part is the major habitat of the Great Slaty Woodpecker and initiatives for the conservation of woodland birds are lacking. Further study and conservation programmes should be initiated immediately in Kapilvastu. As the species is mainly associated with the old growth Sal forest, the logging trend and removal of large and old Sal trees have significant impact on its population. Deadwood removal is found to affect woodpeckers and other fauna (Lindenmayer & Noss 2006).

An assessment of population, distribution and the extent of a suitable habitat would be especially useful and studies of the Great Slaty Woodpecker's, ecology, behavior and breeding habits should help conserve the species towards sustainability.

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