

Seabirds

The Ogasawara Islands can only be reached by an overnight ferry from Tokyo. About 20 hours into the journey, birds appear alongside the ferry, hunting the flying fish that are disturbed by the ship.

Brown boobies (*katsuo-dori*) usually appear first, about five hours before landfall. Their large, sleek bodies glide effortlessly, plunging several meters straight down into the water in pursuit of prey. As the name suggests, brown boobies have brown backs and wings, and the underbellies of juvenile birds are gray or mottled brown. After two years, their underbellies turn white.

Wedge-tailed shearwaters (*onaga-mizunagi-dori*) can often be seen close to the ship as it nears the islands. Named for the way that their wings seem to cut or “shear” the tips of the waves as they fly, these birds are generally brown with white underbellies. As they hunt, they will dive underwater to a depth of 14 meters or more in pursuit of fish.

Late in the night on the way to Ogasawara, the ferry passes the small, uninhabited island of Torishima, the last major island before Chichijima. Literally named “bird island,” Torishima is one of a handful of nesting grounds for the short-tailed albatross (*ahō-dori*), a white bird with black-tipped wings. Hunted for their soft down, short-tailed albatrosses almost went extinct in the 1930s. They are now making a slow comeback, thanks to newly developed mating grounds on Mukojima, as well as an established colony on Torishima,