

Terns and Gulls

Little tern / *Sternula albifrons* / Ko-ajisashi / コアジサシ

As its name suggests, this is a small tern (22 to 28 centimeters long). It can be seen on Amami-Oshima's sandy shores in the early summer, when it makes its nest in colonies on the ground. During breeding season, it has a black cap on the top of its head and a black "mask" over the eyes. Its body and tail are white, with a light-gray back and upper wing surface. The little tern flies fast with a quick wingbeat, and can hover before diving into the water for fish. The male signals courtship by performing an aerial display with a fish, which it then offers to the prospective mate. It has been designated an endangered species in Japan.

Roseate tern / *Sterna dougallii* / Beni-ajisashi / ベニアジサシ

Roseate terns migrate from wintering in Australia to Amami-Oshima for breeding in the summer, nesting in colonies to protect their eggs and fledglings from predators. The plumage of this medium-sized tern (33 to 43 centimeters long) is striking, with a largely white to pale-gray body topped by a black cap on the head. Its long, thin bill is red, as are its legs, and its tail is long and sharply forked. It can hover, and dives for fish in a distinctive and powerful angled dive. Its ability to skewer prey gives the tern its Japanese name: *ajisashi*, from horse mackerel (*aji*) spearing (*sashi*).