WHAT'S UP

Aquatic Detective
An activity of "Saving the Mekong".

1) Read "Saving the Mekong" (pages 6-7, *What's Up* March 2024). Fill in the information cards below to know more about the animal species mentioned in the article. Cut out the missing information and pictures on the next page to fill in the gaps below.

Species name: Irrawaddy dolphin
Appearance: Grey to blue-grey skin, distinctive round forehead and short beak, flattened tail fin, up to 2.75metres in length.
Habitat: Freshwater rivers and estuaries. Found in the Mekong River, particularly in deep pools near the Cambodia-Laos border.
Diet: Primarily fish and crustaceans
Size: Adults can weigh up to 130 kg and grow up to 2.75 meters long.
Conservation Status:

Interesting fact: The Irrawaddy dolphin is known for its unique bulging forehead and smiling appearance. Despite being called a "dolphin", it is more closely related to the killer whale (orca).

Species name: Mekong giant catfish
Appearance: Silver-grey colour. Elongated body with no scales. Large, wide mouth without teeth.
Habitat: Freshwater, mainly in the lower half of the Mekong River.
Diet:

Size: One of the world's largest freshwater fish, it can grow up to 3 meters in length and weigh up to 300 kg.
Conservation Status: Critically Endangered, with numbers decreasing due to overfishing and habitat loss.
Interesting fact: Despite its immense size, the Mekong giant catfish has a very gentle disposition and feeds mainly on plants.

Species name: Clown featherback
Appearance:

Habitat: Freshwater habitats including rivers, lakes, and flooded forests.
Diet: Carnivorous, feeding on smaller fish and crustaceans.
Size: Can reach up to 1 metre in length.
Conservation Status: Not evaluated, but facing threats from habitat destruction and overfishing.
Interesting fact: Known for its striking appearance and is popular in aquariums around the world.

Species name: Giant freshwater stingray
Appearance: Dark brown to grey on top with a white underbelly. Flat, diamond-shaped body with a long, whip-like tail.
Habitat: Bottom of rivers and estuaries, prefers sandy or muddy areas.
Diet: Feeds on small fish and invertebrates.
Size:

Conservation Status: Vulnerable, with populations declining due to habitat loss and fishing pressures.
Interesting fact: The stingray's tail has a potent sting, used primarily for self-defence.
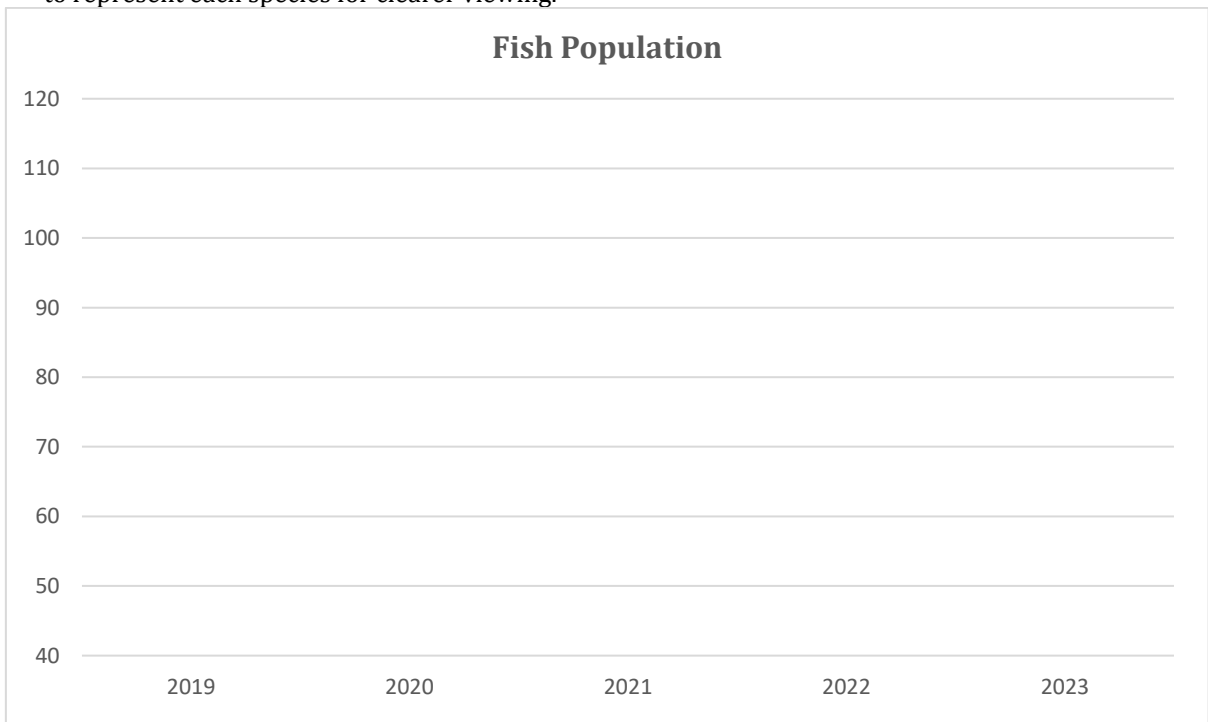
Cut out the following:

Primarily herbivorous, feeding on algae and plankton.	Silver body with black stripes and spots. Long, feather-like dorsal fin.
One of the largest freshwater fish, it can be 5 meters long (including tail) and weigh over 600 kg.	Critically Endangered due to habitat loss, pollution, and accidental capture in fishing gear.

2. Scientists often track the population of animals to understand the health of the species and their ecosystems. The following are some hypothetical data for 3 species over a 5-year period:

Species	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Irrawaddy dolphin	85	80	75	78	82
Mekong giant catfish	60	55	50	53	50
Clown featherback	100	105	110	108	112

a) Using the data above, plot a population line graph for each fish species. Label and use different colours to represent each species for clearer viewing.

Fish Population

b) What do you think accounted for the fluctuations in the population figures?

c) Why do you think such data is valuable for conservation efforts?