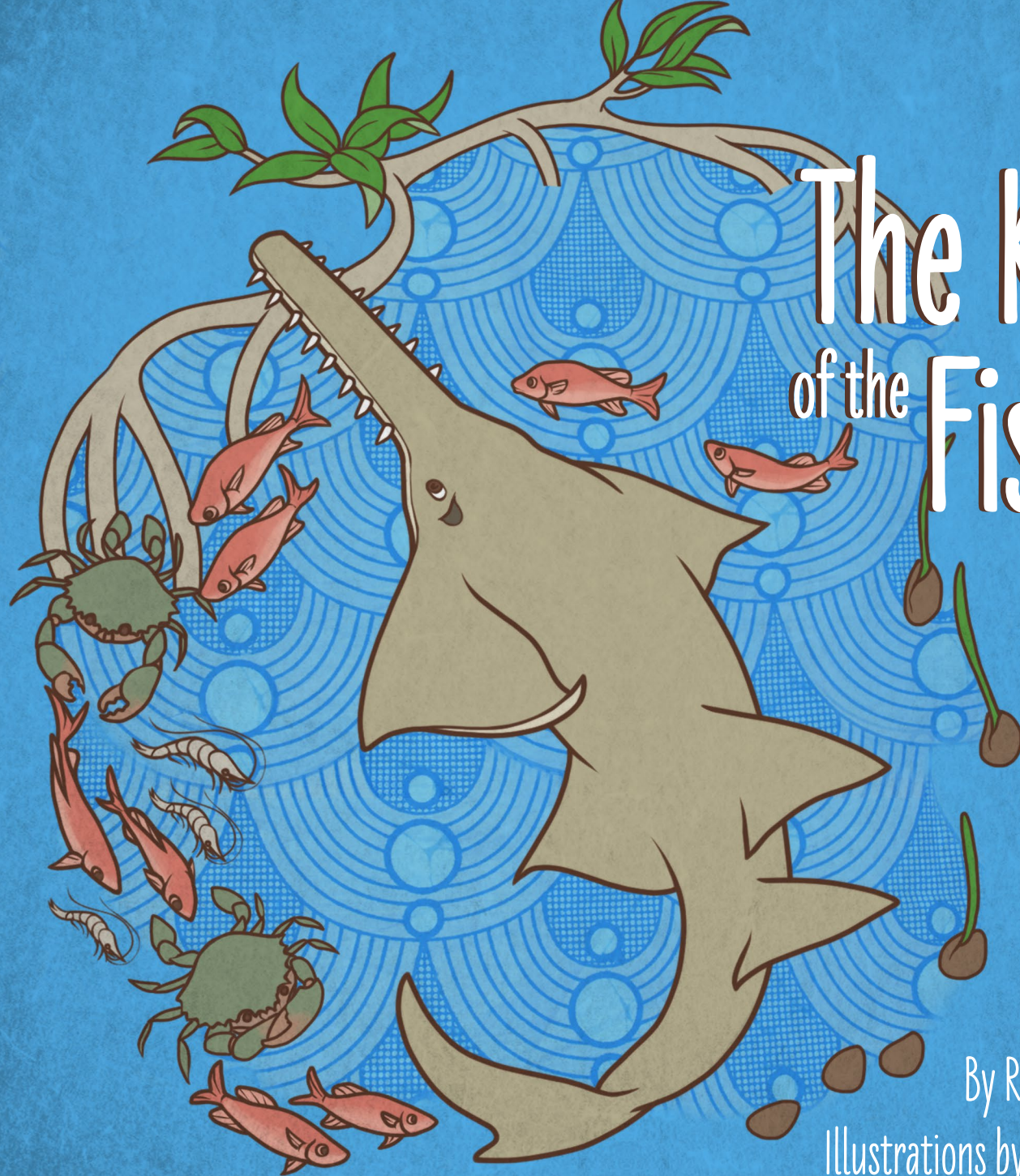


# The King of the Fishes



By Ruth H. Leeney  
Illustrations by Jen Richards





*For Lamin Sowe, and the children of fisherfolk everywhere.*

*Protect Africa's Sawfishes* works throughout Africa to collect information on sawfish populations and collaborates with governments and local communities to understand how best to protect those populations from decline.



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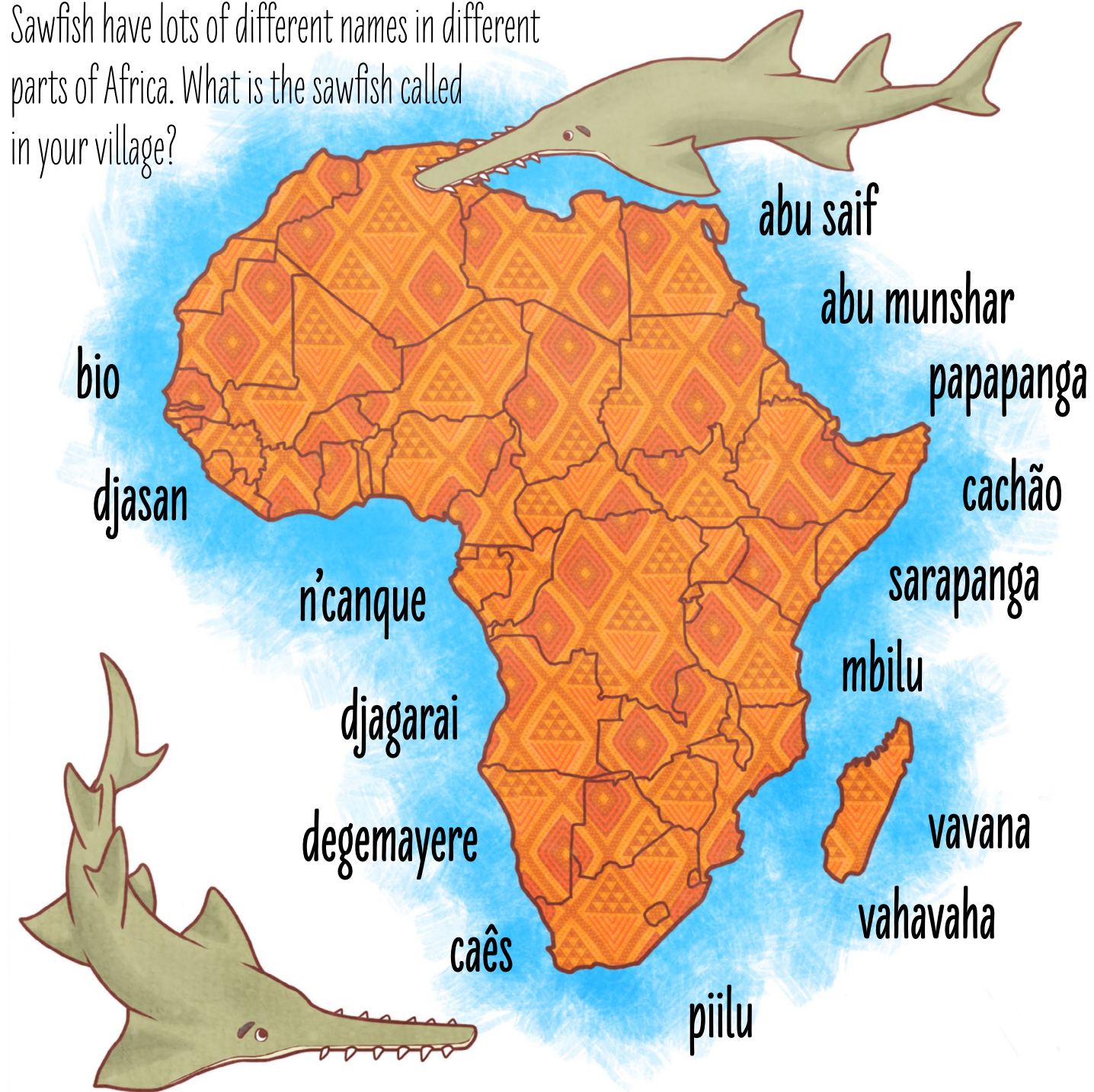
Mama, what is this?  
Is it from a shark?  
Is it a weapon?



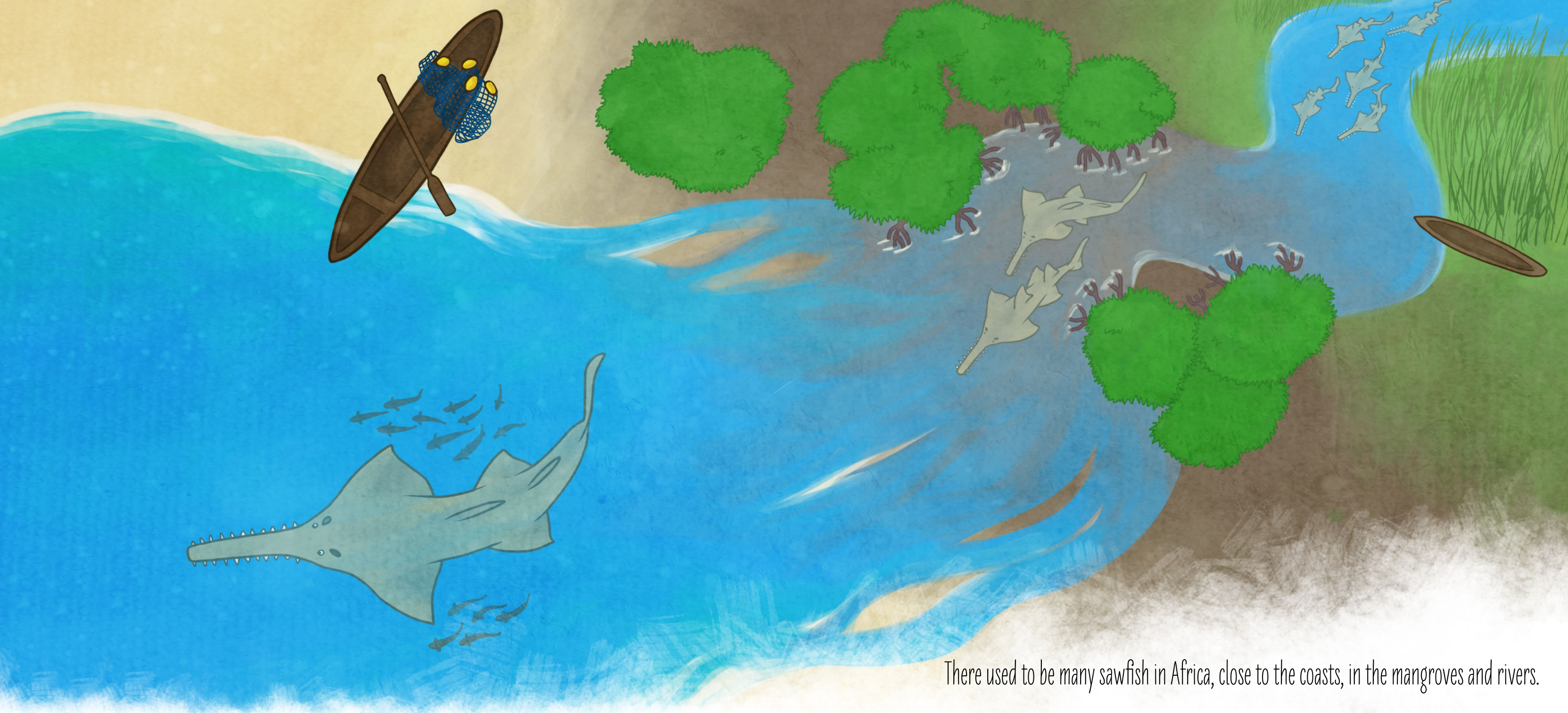




Sawfish have lots of different names in different parts of Africa. What is the sawfish called in your village?







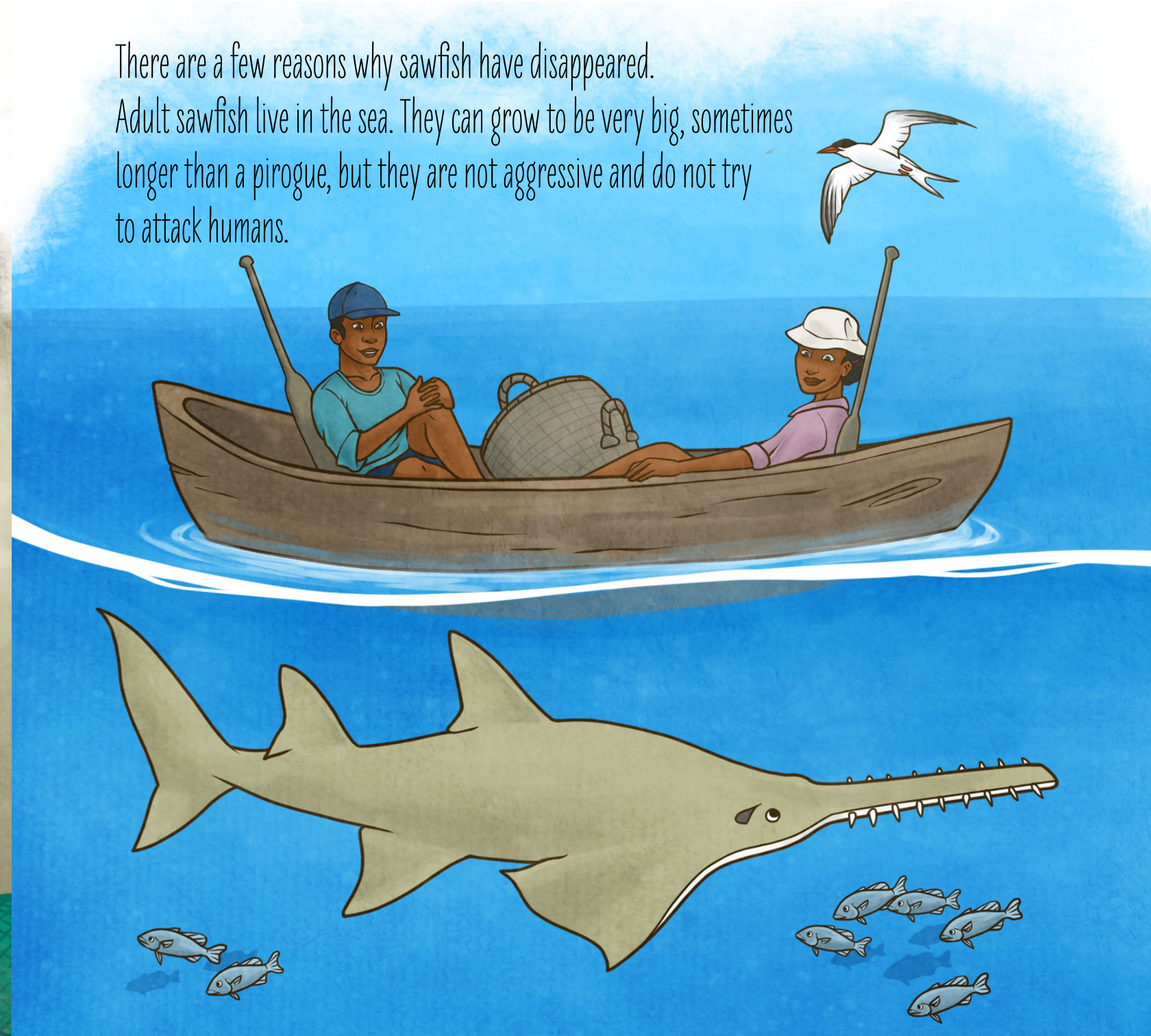
There used to be many sawfish in Africa, close to the coasts, in the mangroves and rivers.



Now, many sawfish have disappeared. But why?

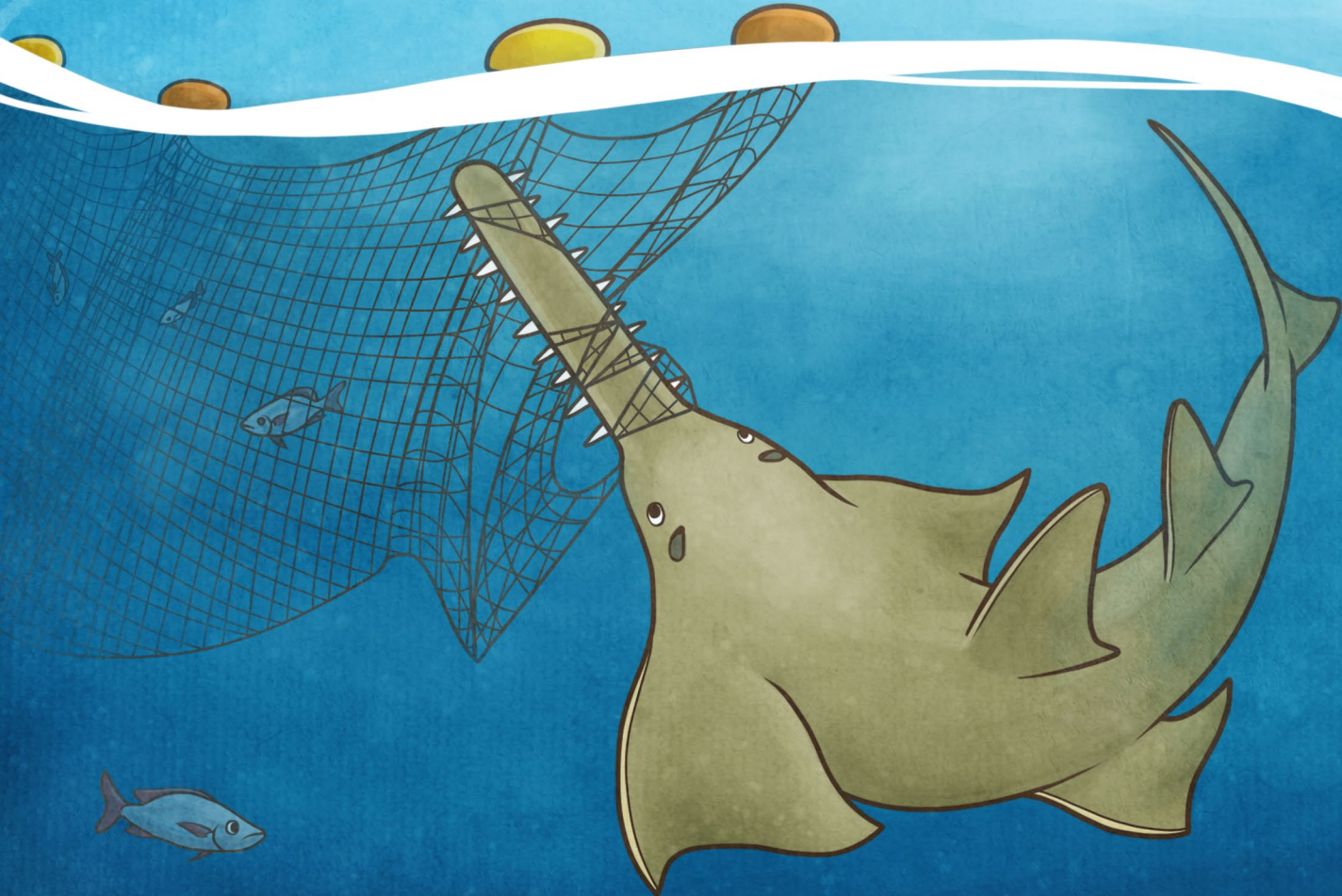


There are a few reasons why sawfish have disappeared. Adult sawfish live in the sea. They can grow to be very big, sometimes longer than a pirogue, but they are not aggressive and do not try to attack humans.

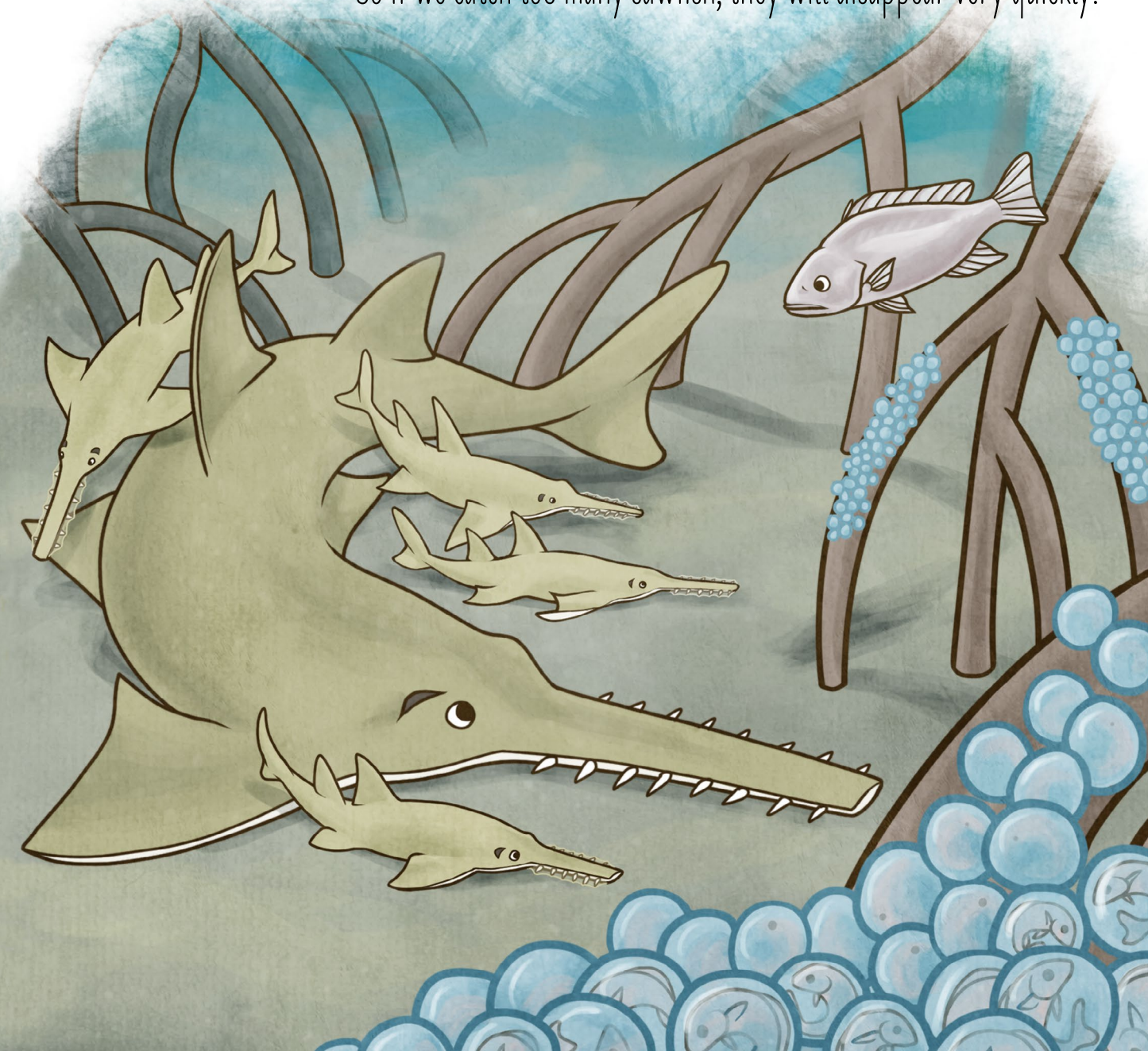




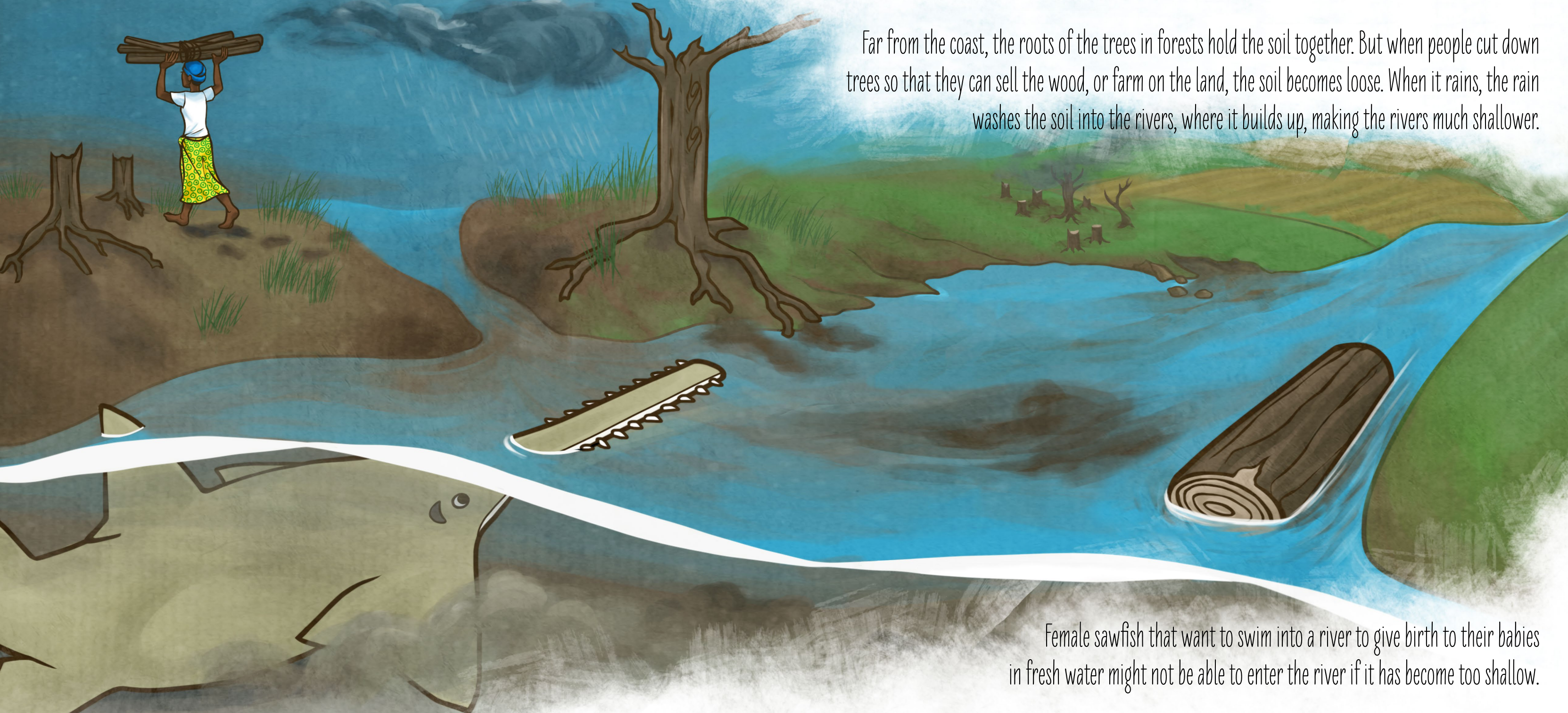
But the sawfish's saw gets stuck in fishing nets, and then they are easy to catch.  
The more fishing nets there are, the more sawfish get caught.



Unlike some other fish, sawfish only have a small number of babies every year.  
So if we catch too many sawfish, they will disappear very quickly!







Far from the coast, the roots of the trees in forests hold the soil together. But when people cut down trees so that they can sell the wood, or farm on the land, the soil becomes loose. When it rains, the rain washes the soil into the rivers, where it builds up, making the rivers much shallower.

Female sawfish that want to swim into a river to give birth to their babies in fresh water might not be able to enter the river if it has become too shallow.



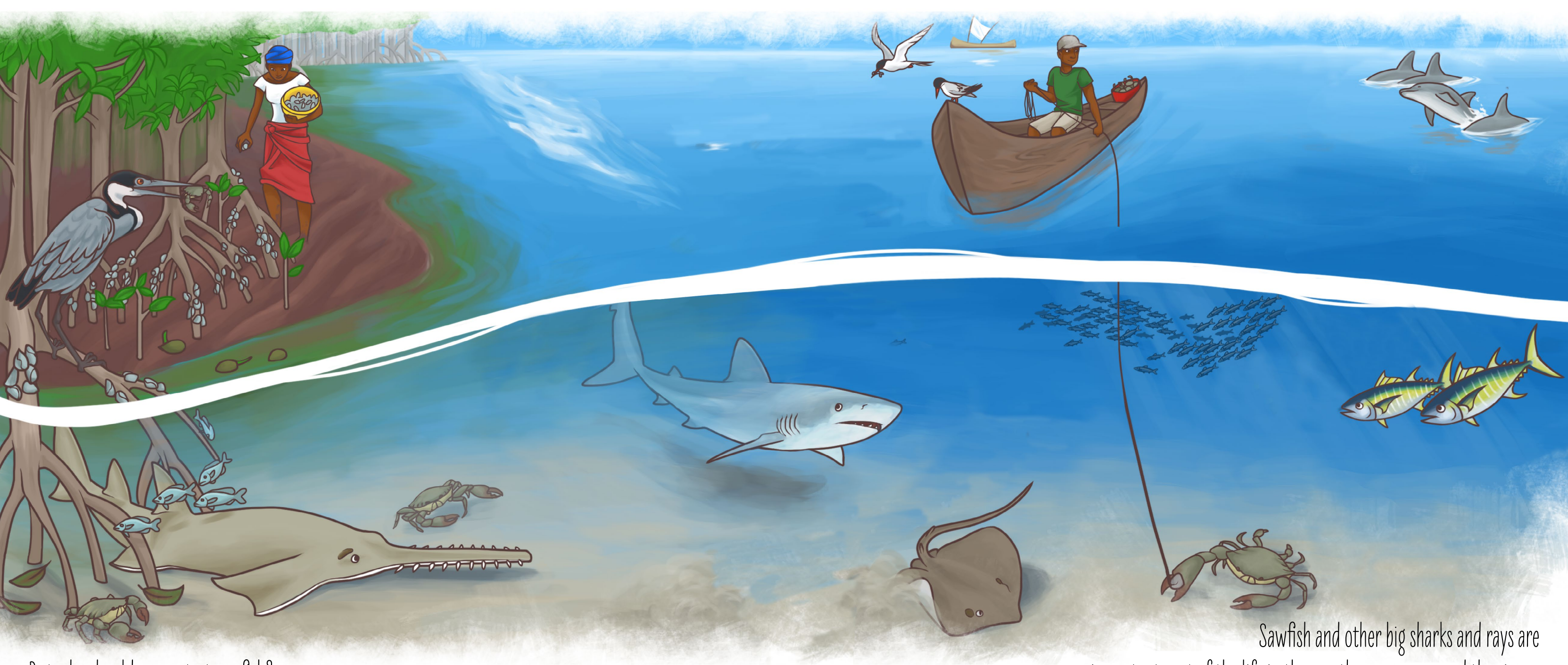
Baby sawfish like to hide in the mangroves, to stay away from crocodiles and big sharks that want to eat them.



But when people cut down all the mangrove trees for wood, or to grow rice, the sawfish have nowhere to hide.



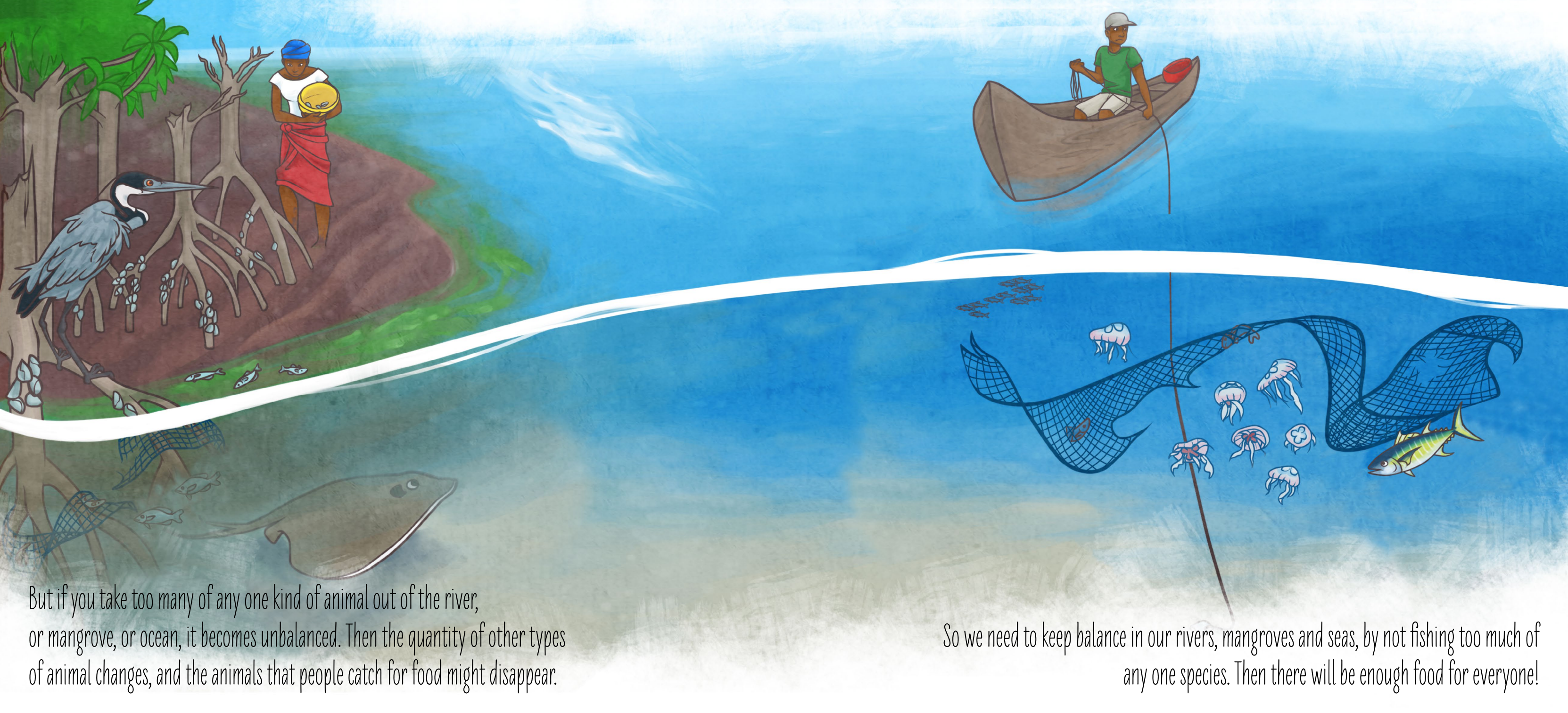




But why should we protect sawfish?

Sawfish and other big sharks and rays are an important part of the life in the sea, the mangroves and the rivers.





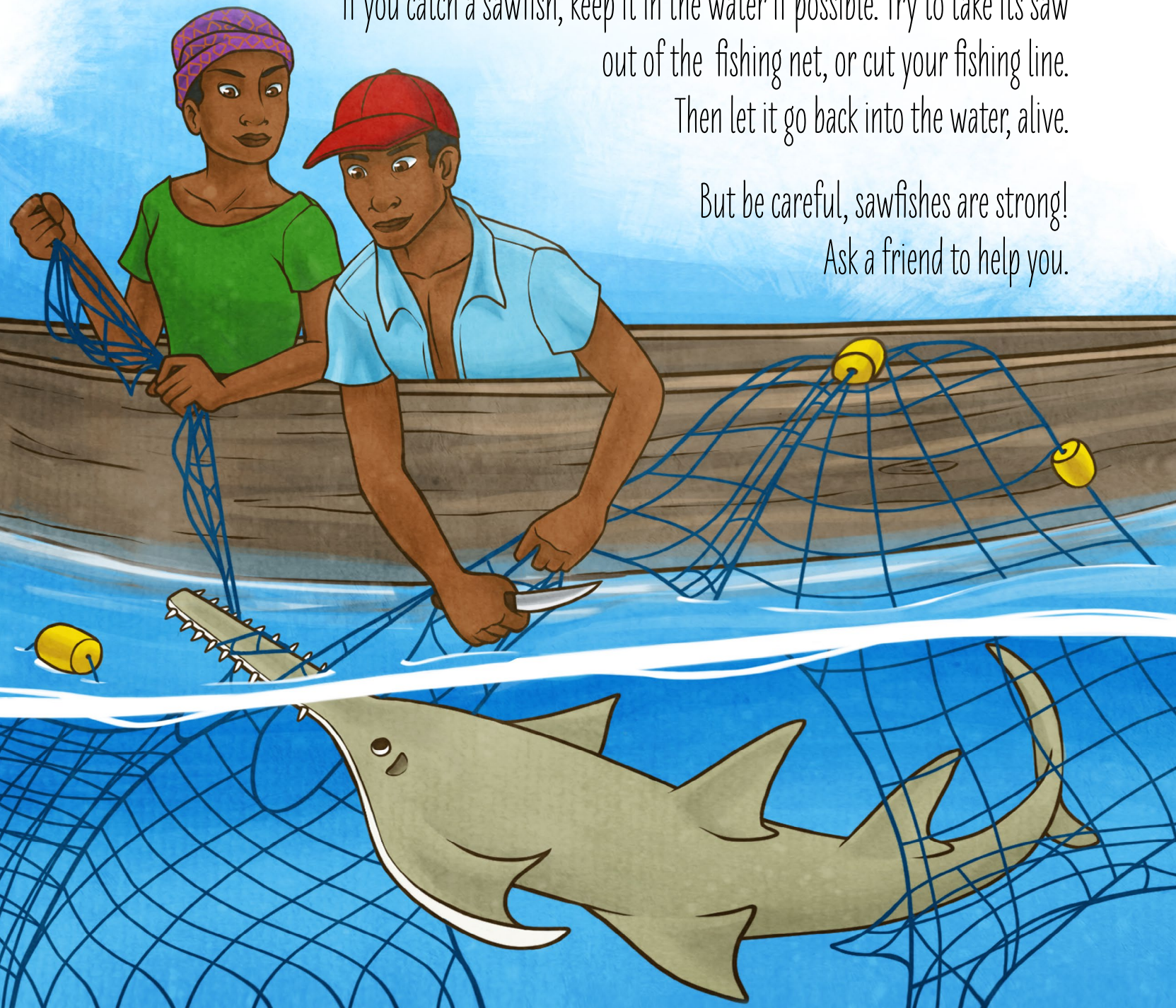
But if you take too many of any one kind of animal out of the river, or mangrove, or ocean, it becomes unbalanced. Then the quantity of other types of animal changes, and the animals that people catch for food might disappear.

So we need to keep balance in our rivers, mangroves and seas, by not fishing too much of any one species. Then there will be enough food for everyone!



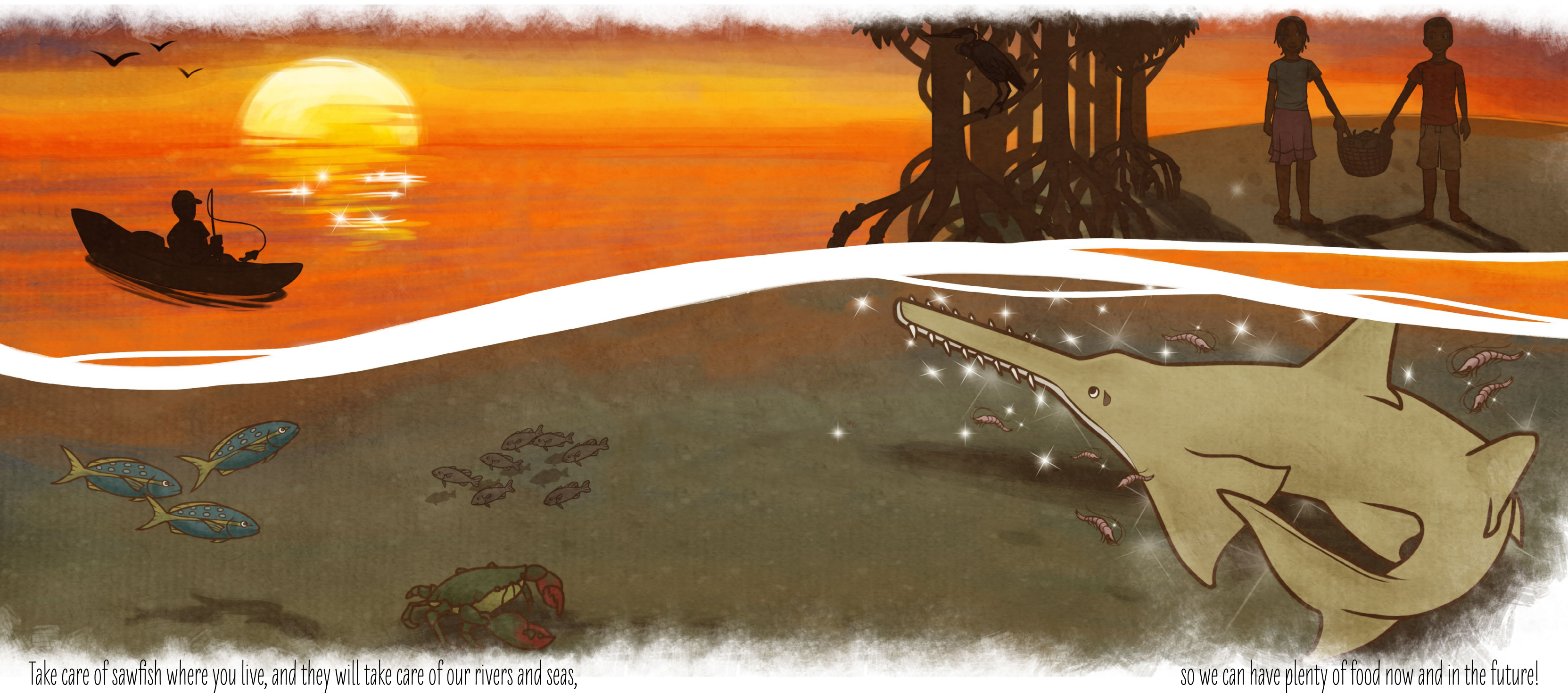
If you catch a sawfish, keep it in the water if possible. Try to take its saw out of the fishing net, or cut your fishing line. Then let it go back into the water, alive.

But be careful, sawfishes are strong!  
Ask a friend to help you.



Then, report your sawfish catch to your nearest fisheries officer. They can use this information to learn more about sawfish in your area.





Take care of sawfish where you live, and they will take care of our rivers and seas,

so we can have plenty of food now and in the future!



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Save Our Seas Foundation (SOSF)  
Rue Philippe Plantamour 20  
CH-1201 Geneva | Switzerland  
w [saveourseas.com](http://saveourseas.com)  
e [info@saveourseas.com](mailto:info@saveourseas.com)

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[www.saveourseas.com](http://www.saveourseas.com) | [www.saveourseas.org](http://www.saveourseas.org)

Text written by Ruth H. Leeney | [www.facebook.com/ProtectAfricasSawfishes/](http://www.facebook.com/ProtectAfricasSawfishes/)  
Illustrations by Jen Richards | [www.jenrichardsart.com](http://www.jenrichardsart.com)  
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