

Tasks: Fundamentals of Data Analysis

ian.mcloughlin@atu.ie

Last updated: 22 August 2023

1. The Collatz conjecture¹ is a famous unsolved problem in mathematics. The problem is to prove that if you start with any positive integer x and repeatedly apply the function $f(x)$ below, you always get stuck in the repeating sequence 1, 2, 4, 1, 2, 4, ...

$$f(x) = \begin{cases} x \div 2 & \text{if } x \text{ is even} \\ 3x + 1 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

For example, starting with the value 10, which is an even number, we divide it by 2 to get 5. Then 5 is an odd number so, we multiply by 3 and add 1 to get 16. Then we repeatedly divide by 2 to get 8, 4, 2, 1. Once we are at 1, we go back to 4 and get stuck in the repeating sequence 4, 2, 1 as we suspected.

Your task is to verify, using Python, that the conjecture is true for the first 10,000 positive integers.

¹ *The Simple Math Problem We Still Can't Solve* | Quanta Magazine. Sept. 22, 2020.
URL: <https://www.quantamagazine.org/why-mathematicians-still-cant-solve-the-collatz-conjecture-20200922/> (visited on 08/18/2023).