

Lower bounds for periods of Ducci sequences

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Abstract

A Ducci sequence is a sequence of integer n -tuples obtained by iterating the map

$$D : (a_1, a_2, \dots, a_n) \mapsto (|a_1 - a_2|, |a_2 - a_3|, \dots, |a_n - a_1|).$$

Such a sequence is eventually periodic and we denote by $P(n)$ the maximal period of such sequences for given n . We prove lower bounds for $P(n)$ by counting certain partitions.

1. Introduction

Let n be a positive integer. A Ducci sequence is a sequence of integer n -tuples obtained by iterating the map

$$D : \mathbb{Z}^n \rightarrow \mathbb{Z}^n;$$

defined as follows:

$$D : (a_1, a_2, \dots, a_n) \mapsto (|a_1 - a_2|, |a_2 - a_3|, \dots, |a_n - a_1|).$$

There is a long literature on Ducci sequences, see for example [BLM07, BM08, Bre19, CM37, CST05, Cla18, Ehr90, Lud81, MST06, SB18] and the references therein.

Ducci sequences are eventually periodic, and for each n the largest period is denoted by $P(n)$; it is the period of the sequence starting with $(0, 0, \dots, 0, 1)$. The sequence $P(1), P(2), \dots$ is entry A038553 in the Online Encyclopedia of Integer Sequences [OEIS]. Since $P(2^k) = 1$ and $P(2^k m) = 2^k P(m)$ if m is not a power of 2, by [Ehr90, Theorem 4], we restrict our attention to odd n .

The following upper bounds on $P(n)$ are known. Denote by $t = \text{ord}_{(\mathbb{Z}/n\mathbb{Z})^*}(2)$ the multiplicative order of 2 modulo n . If there exists an integer M for which $2^M \equiv -1 \pmod{n}$, then we say n is ‘with -1 ’. The first of the following upper bounds is proved in [Lud81], the second in [Ehr90] and the third in [Bre19].

It is convenient to introduce the following quantities

$$B_1(n) = 2^t - 1 \quad \text{and} \quad B_2(n) = n(2^{t/2} - 1). \quad (1.1)$$

Theorem A *Let n be an odd integer, and t the multiplicative order of 2 modulo n . Then,*

1. $P(n)$ divides $B_1(n)$.
2. Suppose n is with -1 , then $P(n)$ divides $B_2(n)$.
3. Suppose that $n = p^k$ with $p \equiv 5 \pmod{8}$ prime and 2 is a primitive root modulo p^k . If the equation $x^2 - py^2 = -4$ has no solutions in odd integers $x, y \in \mathbb{Z}$, then $P(n)$ divides $\frac{1}{3}B_2(n)$.

As for lower bounds, the first of the following results is found again in [Ehr90], and the remaining ones in [GS95].

Theorem B *Let n be an odd integer. Then*

1. n divides $P(n)$.
2. $P(n) = n$ if and only if $n = 2^r - 1$ for some positive integer r .
3. If n is with -1 , then $P(n) \geq n(n - 2)$.
4. If n is with -1 , then $P(n) = n(n - 2)$ if and only if $n = 2^r + 1$ for some positive integer r .

The goal of the present paper is to prove new asymptotic lower bounds for $P(n)$ in terms of t and n . Our starting point is the fact from [BLM07] that $P(n)$ is the lowest common multiple of multiplicative orders of elements $\zeta + 1$, where ζ is a primitive n th root of unity in the finite field \mathbb{F}_{2^t} .

Since our results require that at least $t > \sqrt{2n}$ holds, in Section 4 we also give a short survey of known results about the size of t .

2. Multiplicative orders and partitions

Let $1 \leq a < n$ be an integer prime to n .

Consider the set of representatives, chosen in the interval $[1, n]$, of the coset $a\langle 2 \rangle \subseteq (\mathbb{Z}/n\mathbb{Z})^*$ of the multiplicative group $\langle 2 \rangle$ generated by 2 in the residues ring modulo n . That is,

$$\mathcal{S}_{a,n} := \{j \in \mathbb{Z}_{>0} : 1 \leq j \leq n, \gcd(j, n) = 1, \\ \exists e_j \in \mathbb{Z}_{\geq 0}, j \equiv a2^{e_j} \pmod{n}\}$$

Its cardinality is $\#\mathcal{S}_{a,n} = t$.

Next, we consider the set of partitions of numbers $\leq t - 1$ into distinct parts from $\mathcal{S}_{a,n}$:

$$\mathcal{P}_{a,n} := \{(u_j)_{j \in \mathcal{S}_{a,n}} \in \{0, 1\}^t \mid \sum_{j \in \mathcal{S}_{a,n}} u_j j \leq t - 1\}. \quad (2.1)$$

Our main result is

Theorem 2.1 *Suppose n is odd and a is relatively prime to n . Then $P(n) \geq \#\mathcal{P}_{a,n}$.*

Proof. It follows from [BLM07, Theorem 3.9] that $P(n)$ is the lowest common multiple of the multiplicative orders of $\zeta + 1$, where ζ ranges over all n th roots of unity $1 \neq \zeta \in \mathbb{F}_{2^t}$.

Let $\zeta \in \mathbb{F}_{2^t}$ be a primitive n th root of unity. The idea is to show that every partition in $\mathcal{P}_{a,n}$ leads to a distinct power of $\zeta + 1$. For this we follow the strategy of [ASV10].

Let $u = (u_j)_{j \in \mathcal{S}_{a,n}} \in \mathcal{P}_{a,n}$, and set

$$Q_u = \sum_{j \in \mathcal{S}_{a,n}} u_j 2^{e_j},$$

where $j \equiv a2^{e_j} \pmod{n}$. We also choose an integer b for which $ab \equiv 1 \pmod{n}$. Now

$$\begin{aligned} (\zeta + 1)^{Q_u} &= \prod_{j \in \mathcal{S}_{a,n}} (\zeta + 1)^{u_j 2^{e_j}} = \prod_{j \in \mathcal{S}_{a,n}} (\zeta^{2^{e_j}} + 1)^{u_j} \\ &= \prod_{j \in \mathcal{S}_{a,n}} (\zeta^{bj} + 1)^{u_j} = \prod_{j \in \mathcal{S}_{a,n}} (\vartheta^j + 1)^{u_j}, \end{aligned}$$

where $\vartheta = \zeta^b \in \mathbb{F}_{2^t}$ is another primitive n th root of unity.

Let

$$v = (v_j)_{j \in \mathcal{S}_{a,n}} \in \mathcal{P}_{a,n}$$

be another partition distinct from u , we must show that v gives rise to a distinct power of $\zeta + 1$. Suppose $(\zeta + 1)^{Q_u} = (\zeta + 1)^{Q_v}$, so

$$\prod_{j \in \mathcal{S}_{a,n}} (\vartheta^j + 1)^{u_j} = \prod_{j \in \mathcal{S}_{a,n}} (\vartheta^j + 1)^{v_j}.$$

Denote by $f(X) \in \mathbb{F}_2[X]$ the minimal polynomial of ϑ ; it has degree t . Then $f(X)$ must divide $U(X) - V(X)$, where

$$U(X) = \prod_{j \in \mathcal{S}_{a,n}} (X^j + 1)^{u_j} \quad \text{and} \quad V(X) = \prod_{j \in \mathcal{S}_{a,n}} (X^j + 1)^{v_j}.$$

Since these polynomials have degree $\leq t - 1 < \deg f$ it follows that $U(X) = V(X)$. After removing common factors from both polynomials (corresponding to $u_j = v_j$), we obtain the identity

$$\prod_{h \in \mathcal{H}} (X^h + 1)^{u_h} = \prod_{k \in \mathcal{K}} (X^k + 1)^{v_k}, \quad (2.2)$$

where \mathcal{H} and \mathcal{K} are disjoint subsets of $\mathcal{S}_{a,n}$. But now we find that the term of smallest positive degree is x^e where e is the smallest element of $\mathcal{H} \cup \mathcal{K}$, but this only appears on one side of the identity (2.2). This contradiction concludes the proof. \square

Remark 2.2 *Some parts of the proof of Theorem 2.1 can be shortened by appealing to [Pop14, Lemma 1], however for completeness and since [Pop14] may not be easily accessible, we present a full self-contained proof.*

3. Counting partitions

Now we construct lower bounds for the cardinality of $\mathcal{P}_{a,n}$ for n of prescribed arithmetic structure. As we have mentioned, these bounds are only useful if t is not too small, specifically $t > \sqrt{2n}$.

Suppose first that $t = \varphi(n)$, that is, 2 is a primitive root modulo n . In this case, $n = p^k$ must be a power of an odd prime p .

When $n = p$, we find that $\mathcal{P}_{a,n}$ contains the set of partitions of $n - 2$ into distinct parts, and the standard asymptotic for that gives (see e.g. [And76, Theorem 6.4])

Corollary 3.1 *Suppose $n = p$ is an odd prime and 2 is a primitive root modulo p . Then, as $n \rightarrow \infty$,*

$$P(n) \geq \exp \left[\left(\frac{\pi}{\sqrt{3}} + o(1) \right) \sqrt{n} \right].$$

The case of Corollary 3.1 is already contained in [Pop12, Theorem 1]; in particular, the completely explicit lower bound (for 2 a primitive root modulo $n = p$)

$$P(n) \geq (80(n - 2))^{-\sqrt{2}} \exp \left(\pi \sqrt{\frac{n - 2}{3}} \right)$$

follows from [Pop12, Corollary 4], see also [Pop14] for some related results.

Next, suppose that $n = p^k$ and 2 is a primitive root modulo n . For this it suffices that 2 is a primitive root modulo p and p is not a Wieferich prime, that is, $2^{p-1} \not\equiv 1 \pmod{p^2}$.

We have $t = p^{k-1}(p-1)$ and $\mathcal{P}_{a,n}$ contains the set of partitions of $t-1$ into distinct parts which are not divisible by p . An asymptotic formula for the number of such partitions appears in [Hag64, Corollary 7.2], and we obtain

Corollary 3.2 *Fix an odd non-Wieferich prime p and suppose that 2 is a primitive root modulo p . Let $n = p^k$, then as $k \rightarrow \infty$, we have*

$$P(n) \geq \exp \left[\left(\frac{\pi}{\sqrt{3}} \sqrt{\frac{p-1}{p}} + o(1) \right) \sqrt{n} \right].$$

If $t < \varphi(n)$, then, inspired by [GS98], we estimate the cardinality of $\mathcal{P}_{a,n}$ as follows. Let $2 \leq N < t$ be an integer, and denote by $\mathcal{S}_{a,n}(N) = \mathcal{S}_{a,n} \cap [1, N]$. Each subset $\mathcal{J} \subseteq \mathcal{S}_{a,n}(N)$ of cardinality $\#\mathcal{J} = J \leq t/N$ produces a valid partition $u \in \mathcal{P}_{a,n}$, where $u_j = 1$ if $j \in \mathcal{J}$ and $u_j = 0$ otherwise. Thus we obtain

$$\#\mathcal{P}_{a,n} \geq \sum_{J \leq t/N} \binom{\#\mathcal{S}_{a,n}(N)}{J}.$$

It remains to estimate $\#\mathcal{S}_{a,n}(N)$ and choose suitable a and N .

It is well known that,

$$\#\{j : 1 \leq j \leq N, \gcd(j, n) = 1\} = N\varphi(n)/n + O(n^{o(1)}),$$

see, for example, [Shp18, Lemma 2.1].

Now among the cosets of $\langle 2 \rangle \subseteq (\mathbb{Z}/n\mathbb{Z})^*$, at least one must have at least the average number of representatives in $[1, N]$, so there exists an integer a , prime to n , for which

$$\begin{aligned} \#\mathcal{S}_{a,n}(N) &\geq \frac{t}{\varphi(n)} \cdot \#\{j : 1 \leq j \leq N, \gcd(j, n) = 1\} \\ &= \frac{t}{\varphi(n)} (N\varphi(n)/n + O(n^{o(1)})) = (1 + o(1)) \frac{tN}{n} \end{aligned}$$

as $n \rightarrow \infty$, provided $N \geq n^\varepsilon$ for some fixed $\varepsilon > 0$.

Now we choose $N = \lfloor \sqrt{2n} \rfloor$. Since $t \geq n^{1/2+\varepsilon}$, we have

$$\#\mathcal{S}_{a,n}(N) \geq \frac{tN}{n} + O(n^{o(1)}) = (2 + o(1)) \frac{t}{N}.$$

Thus by the Stirling formula

$$\begin{aligned} \#\mathcal{P}_{a,n} &\geq \sum_{J \leq t/N} \binom{\#\mathcal{S}_{a,n}(N)}{J} \geq \binom{\#\mathcal{S}_{a,n}(N)}{\lfloor t/N \rfloor} \\ &\geq \exp\left((2 \log 2 + o(1)) \frac{t}{N}\right). \end{aligned}$$

Thus we have proved

Corollary 3.3 *Suppose n is odd and t is the multiplicative order of 2 modulo n . Then*

$$P(n) \geq \exp\left[(\log 4 + o(1)) \frac{t}{\sqrt{2n}}\right].$$

In particular, if $n = p^k$ then it is easy to show that $t \geq c(p)p^k$, where $c(p) > 0$ depends only on p , hence Corollary 3.3 gives a version of Corollary 3.2 in the form

$$P(n) \geq \exp(c(p)\sqrt{n}).$$

We remark that the condition $t > \sqrt{2n}$ of Corollary 3.3 corresponds to the limits of our method. Indeed, there are about $\varphi(n)/t$ distinct cosets $\mathcal{S}_{a,n}$ and since $\varphi(n) = n^{1+o(1)}$ each of them is expected to contain very few elements from the interval $[1, t]$ which are the only suitable elements which can be used in the construction of the set $\mathcal{P}_{a,n}$ given by (2.1).

Since

$$\frac{\log 4}{\sqrt{2}} \approx 0.98025 \quad \text{and} \quad \frac{\pi}{\sqrt{3}} \approx 1.8138,$$

in the case of $t \approx n$ we recover a result similar to Corollaries 3.1 and 3.2, but with a smaller constant in the exponent.

Our lower bounds are quite small compared to the upper bounds $P(n) \leq B_1(n) \sim 2^t$ and $P(n) \leq B_2(n) \sim n2^{t/2}$, see (1.1), which follow from Theorem A. On the other hand, they are typically much stronger than linear and quadratic in n lower bounds which one can extract from Theorem B.

4. Lower bounds on multiplicative orders

Since the quality of our bounds depends rather dramatically on the multiplicative order of 2 modulo n , here we give a short outline of known results.

First we observe that the applicability of Corollary 3.1 for infinitely many prime $n = p$ is equivalent to *Artin's conjecture*, see [Mor12] for an exhaustive survey. On the other hand, we are not aware of any conditional (and certainly unconditional) results or well-established conjectures towards a version of Artin's conjecture for non-Wieferich primes which appear Corollary 3.2. It is natural to expect that there are infinitely many such primes but known results are scarce [Sil88].

Primes p and integers n for which t is large, in particular exceeds \sqrt{p} , have been studied in many different contexts, but most commonly in the theory of *pseudorandom number generators*. These results originate from the work of Erdős and Murty [EM99] and are conveniently summarised in [KP05]. For example, for any function $\psi(n) \rightarrow 0$ as $n \rightarrow \infty$ we have $t \geq n^{1/2+\psi(n)}$ for almost all (in a sense of relative density) primes $p = n$ (see [EM99, Theorem 1]) and odd integers n (see [KP05, Theorem 11]). Furthermore, for a positive proportion of primes $p = n$ (see [KP05, Lemma 19]) and odd integers n (see [KP05, Theorem 21]) we have $t \geq n^{0.677}$.

5. Numerical results

It is interesting to compare the lower bound of Theorem 2.1 with actual values of $P(n)$. Table 5.1 shows numerical values of $P(n)$ and $\#\mathcal{P}_{a,n}$ for odd $n \leq 101$ and a representative a for each coset $(\mathbb{Z}/n\mathbb{Z})^*/\langle 2 \rangle$. Unsurprisingly, the largest value of $\#\mathcal{P}_{a,n}$ is achieved for $a = 1$ in these small cases, due to the presence of small powers of two in $\mathcal{S}_{a,n}$. However, when $n = 109$, we find that

$$\#\mathcal{P}_{1,109} = 99 < 178 = \#\mathcal{P}_{3,109} = \max_{\gcd(a,109)=1} \#\mathcal{P}_{a,109}.$$

These values were computed using Sage.

n	$P(n)$	t	a	$\#\mathcal{P}_{a,n}$
3	3	2	1	2
5	15	4	1	5
7	7	3	1	3
-	-	-	3	1
9	63	6	1	7
11	341	10	1	33
13	819	12	1	55
15	15	4	1	4
-	-	-	7	1
17	255	8	1	8
-	-	-	3	5
19	9709	18	1	207
21	63	6	1	6
-	-	-	5	2
23	2047	11	1	28
-	-	-	5	4
25	25575	20	1	190
27	13797	18	1	79
29	475107	28	1	1261
31	31	5	1	5
-	-	-	3	2
-	-	-	5	1
-	-	-	7	1
-	-	-	11	1
-	-	-	15	1
33	1023	10	1	10
-	-	-	5	3
35	4095	12	1	16
-	-	-	3	4
37	3233097	36	1	4310
39	4095	12	1	22
-	-	-	7	2
41	41943	20	1	70
-	-	-	3	25
43	5461	14	1	17
-	-	-	3	10
-	-	-	7	4
45	4095	12	1	12
-	-	-	7	3
47	8388607	23	1	241
-	-	-	5	14
49	2097151	21	1	53
-	-	-	3	27
51	255	8	1	8
-	-	-	5	3
-	-	-	11	1
-	-	-	19	1
53	3556769739	52	1	35680
55	1048575	20	1	66
-	-	-	3	8
57	29127	18	1	33
-	-	-	5	8
59	31675383749	58	1	72503
61	65498251203	60	1	91103
63	63	6	1	6
-	-	-	5	2
-	-	-	11	1
-	-	-	13	1
-	-	-	23	1
-	-	-	31	1
65	4095	12	1	12
-	-	-	3	4
-	-	-	7	3
-	-	-	11	2
67	575525617597	66	1	176945
69	4194303	22	1	31
-	-	-	5	17
71	34359738367	35	1	1427
-	-	-	7	35
73	511	9	1	9
-	-	-	3	3
-	-	-	5	3
-	-	-	9	1
-	-	-	11	1
-	-	-	13	1
-	-	-	17	1
-	-	-	25	1
75	1048575	20	1	24
-	-	-	7	6
77	1073741823	30	1	100
-	-	-	3	70
79	549755813887	39	1	1028
-	-	-	3	106
81	10871635887	54	1	6159
83	182518930210733	82	1	911361
85	255	8	1	8
-	-	-	3	3
-	-	-	7	2
-	-	-	9	1
-	-	-	13	1
-	-	-	21	1
-	-	-	29	1
-	-	-	37	1
87	268435455	28	1	154
-	-	-	5	9
89	2047	11	1	11
-	-	-	3	6
-	-	-	5	3
-	-	-	9	2
-	-	-	11	1
-	-	-	13	1
-	-	-	19	1
-	-	-	33	1
91	4095	12	1	12
-	-	-	3	8
-	-	-	9	2
-	-	-	11	2
-	-	-	17	1
-	-	-	19	1
93	1023	10	1	10
-	-	-	5	2
-	-	-	7	2
-	-	-	11	1
-	-	-	17	1
-	-	-	23	1
95	22906492245	36	1	905
-	-	-	7	17
97	1627389855	48	1	2216
-	-	-	5	283
99	3243933	30	1	49
-	-	-	5	32
101	37905296863701641	100	1	4827382

Table 5.1: Values of $P(n)$ and $\#\mathcal{P}_{a,n}$ for odd $n \leq 101$.

Acknowledgments The first author thanks the Alexander-von-Humboldt Foundation for support, the Universität Heidelberg for hospitality and Hannes Breuer for interesting discussions. The second author was supported in part by the Australian Research Council Grant DP180100201.

The authors are grateful to the organisers of the the *Sixth Number Theory Down Under* Conference (NTDU-6), Canberra, 24–27 September, 2018, for creating a very encouraging and collaborative atmosphere, which has led to this work.

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