

Numerical Solution of ODEs

Exercise Class

10th October 2025

Cat & Mouse

We consider an ordinary differential equation system modelling a cat chasing a mouse (in two dimensions). The mouse moves from an initial position $(1, 0)$ to its hole at $(0, 0)$ with constant velocity v_m . We can model its position $\mathbf{y}(t) = (y_1(t), y_2(t))$ at time t as

$$\mathbf{y}(t) = \begin{bmatrix} 1 - v_m t \\ 0 \end{bmatrix}, \quad t \in \left[0, \frac{1}{v_m}\right].$$

The cat moves from an initial position $\tilde{\mathbf{x}} \in \mathbb{R}^2$, $\tilde{x}_2 > 0$, with constant velocity $v_c > 0$ towards the mouse's *current position*. The position of the cat at time t is denoted by $\mathbf{x}(t) = (x_1(t), x_2(t))$. To calculate the cat's position we note that at time t the mouse moves in the direction of the vector $\mathbf{y}(t) - \mathbf{x}(t)$; i.e., towards the mouse. The change in position of the cat with respect to time is given by

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{dx_1}{dt} &= f(t)(y_1(t) - x_1(t)) = f(t)(1 - v_m t - x_1) \\ \frac{dx_2}{dt} &= f(t)(y_2(t) - x_2(t)) = -f(t)x_2 \end{aligned}$$

for a function $f(t)$ dependent on t . We can then calculate the velocity of the cat as

$$\left(\left(\frac{dx_1}{dt} \right)^2 + \left(\frac{dx_2}{dt} \right)^2 \right)^{1/2}.$$

However, we know the cat has fixed velocity v_c ; therefore,

$$\begin{aligned} v_c^2 &= (f(t))^2 ((1 - v_m t - x_1)^2 + x_2^2) \\ \implies f(t) &= v_c ((1 - v_m t - x_1)^2 + x_2^2)^{-1/2} \end{aligned}$$

Hence, we derive the ODE system

$$\begin{bmatrix} \frac{dx_1}{dt} \\ \frac{dx_2}{dt} \end{bmatrix} = \frac{v_c}{((1 - v_m t - x_1)^2 + x_2^2)^{1/2}} \begin{bmatrix} 1 - v_m t - x_1 \\ -x_2 \end{bmatrix}$$

Exercises

1. Play with the cat & mouse simulation `catmouse.m/run_catmouse.m`
 - (a) Try various starting positions $\tilde{x}$ for the cat and velocities v_m, v_c .
 - (b) Is there any strange behaviour occurring? When does it occur and why?
 - (c) Study and use `run_catmouseevents.m` to see how `ode23` can be used to detect an event — the cat catching the mouse ($|x - y| = 0$).
2. Does the cat & mouse simulation work in one dimension; i.e., $\tilde{x}_2 = 0$? Solve analytically when/if the cat catches the mouse in this situation for *all* possible starting positions of the cat.
3. The built-in MATLAB simulation `ballode` simulates a bouncing ball:

$$x'' = -g \quad \equiv \quad \begin{cases} x'_1 = x_2 \\ x'_2 = -g \end{cases}$$

where $g = -9.8 \text{ m/s}^2$ is the Earth's gravity, with attenuation of the velocity on hitting the ground (90%). Copy this script and create a variant to handle dynamical friction:

$$x'' = -g - ax'$$

where $a > 0$ represents friction.

4. Use `blowupex.m` to investigate the blow-up behaviour of the ODE:

$$\begin{aligned} x'(t) &= x^2, \\ x(0) &= 1 \end{aligned}$$

- (a) Plot, using `dirfield.m` from last week, the direction field over the intervals $t \in [-1, 1]$ and $x \in [-2, 2]$.
 - (b) Study the solutions, when computing using `ode23`, over the time intervals $t \in [0, 0.99]$, $t \in [0, 1]$, and $t \in [0, 2]$.
5. Use `collapseex.m` to investigate the collapse behaviour of the ODE:

$$\begin{aligned} x'(t) &= -x^{-1/2}, \\ x(0) &= 1 \end{aligned}$$

- (a) Plot, using `dirfield.m` from last week, the direction field over the intervals $t \in [-1, 1]$ and $x \in [0.01, 2]$.
- (b) Study the solutions, when computing using `ode23`, over the time intervals $t \in [0, 2/3]$ and $t \in [0, 1]$.