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 Letters

## The *h* index: playing the numbers game

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The '*h* index' was developed recently as a measure of research performance [1]: a researcher's *h* is the number of his or her papers that have been cited at least *h* times. In their thoughtful critique of the index, Kelly and Jennions [2] point out many ways in which *h* is no better than 'traditional' bibliometrics, such as total citation counts. However, there is one way in which, for researchers, it could be very much better, especially if (as Hirsch suggests [1]) it is to inform hiring and promotion decisions. The skewed nature of the distribution of citations among publications means that most researchers have several papers that nearly but not quite count. Consequently, *h* can be distorted much more easily than can total citation count just by finding a subtle way to cite one's own papers

that are 'bubbling under'. Incidentally, bats show broadly the same life-history allometries as other mammalian clades [3].

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