



PyTables User's Guide

Hierarchical datasets in Python - Release 2.0.3

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Part I. The PyTables Core Library

Chapter 1. Introduction

La sabiduría no vale la pena si no es posible servirse de ella para inventar una nueva manera de preparar los garbanzos.

[Wisdom isn't worth anything if you can't use it to come up with a new way to cook garbanzos.]

--Gabriel García Márquez, *A wise Catalan in "Cien años de soledad"*

The goal of PyTables is to enable the end user to manipulate easily data *tables* and *array* objects in a hierarchical structure. The foundation of the underlying hierarchical data organization is the excellent HDF5 library (see [1]).

It should be noted that this package is not intended to serve as a complete wrapper for the entire HDF5 API, but only to provide a flexible, *very pythonic* tool to deal with (arbitrarily) large amounts of data (typically bigger than available memory) in tables and arrays organized in a hierarchical and persistent disk storage structure.

A table is defined as a collection of records whose values are stored in *fixed-length* fields. All records have the same structure and all values in each field have the same *data type*. The terms *fixed-length* and strict *data types* may seem to be a strange requirement for an interpreted language like Python, but they serve a useful function if the goal is to save very large quantities of data (such as is generated by many data acquisition systems, Internet services or scientific applications, for example) in an efficient manner that reduces demand on CPU time and I/O.

In order to emulate in Python records mapped to HDF5 C structs PyTables implements a special class so as to easily define all its fields and other properties. PyTables also provides a powerful interface to mine data in tables. Records in tables are also known in the HDF5 naming scheme as *compound* data types.

For example, you can define arbitrary tables in Python simply by declaring a class with named fields and type information, such as in the following example:

```
class Particle(IsDescription):
    name          = StringCol(16)      # 16-character String
    idnumber      = Int64Col()         # signed 64-bit integer
    ADCcount      = UInt16Col()        # unsigned short integer
    TDCcount      = UInt8Col()         # unsigned byte
    grid_i        = Int32Col()         # integer
    grid_j        = Int32Col()         # integer
    class Properties(IsDescription):   # A sub-structure (nested data-type)
        pressure   = Float32Col(shape=(2,3)) # 2-D float array (single-
precision)
        energy     = Float64Col(shape=(2,3,4)) # 3-D float array (double-
precision)
```

You then pass this class to the table constructor, fill its rows with your values, and save (arbitrarily large) collections of them to a file for persistent storage. After that, the data can be retrieved and post-processed quite easily with PyTables or even with another HDF5 application (in C, Fortran, Java or whatever language that provides a library to interface with HDF5).

Other important entities in PyTables are *array* objects, which are analogous to tables with the difference that all of their components are homogeneous. They come in different flavors, like *generic* (they provide a quick and fast way

to deal with for numerical arrays), *enlargeable* (arrays can be extended along a single dimension) and *variable length* (each row in the array can have a different number of elements).

The next section describes the most interesting capabilities of PyTables.

1.1. Main Features

PyTables takes advantage of the object orientation and introspection capabilities offered by Python, the powerful data management features of HDF5, and NumPy's flexibility and high-performance manipulation of large sets of objects organized in a grid-like fashion to provide these features:

- *Support for table entities:* You can tailor your data adding or deleting records in your tables. Large numbers of rows (up to 2^{63} , much more than will fit into memory) are supported as well.
- *Multidimensional and nested table cells:* You can declare a column to consist of values having any number of dimensions besides scalars, which is the only dimensionality allowed by the majority of relational databases. You can even declare columns that are made of other columns (of different types).
- *Indexing support for columns of tables:* Very useful if you have large tables and you want to quickly look up for values in columns satisfying some criteria.



Note

Column indexing is only available in PyTables Pro.

- *Support for numerical arrays:* NumPy (see [8]), Numeric (see [9]) and numarray (see [10]) arrays can be used as a useful complement of tables to store homogeneous data.
- *Enlargeable arrays:* You can add new elements to existing arrays on disk in any dimension you want (but only one). Besides, you are able to access just a slice of your datasets by using the powerful extended slicing mechanism, without need to load all your complete dataset in memory.
- *Variable length arrays:* The number of elements in these arrays can vary from row to row. This provides a lot of flexibility when dealing with complex data.
- *Supports a hierarchical data model:* Allows the user to clearly structure all data. PyTables builds up an *object tree* in memory that replicates the underlying file data structure. Access to objects in the file is achieved by walking through and manipulating this object tree.
- *User defined metadata:* Besides supporting system metadata (like the number of rows of a table, shape, flavor, etc.) the user may specify arbitrary metadata (as for example, room temperature, or protocol for IP traffic that was collected) that complement the meaning of actual data.
- *Ability to read/modify generic HDF5 files:* PyTables can access a wide range of objects in generic HDF5 files, like compound type datasets (that can be mapped to `Table` objects), homogeneous datasets (that can be mapped to `Array` objects) or variable length record datasets (that can be mapped to `VLArray` objects). Besides, if a dataset is not supported, it will be mapped to a special `UnImplemented` class (see [Section 4.11](#)), that will let the user see that the data is there, although it will be unreachable (still, you will be able to access the attributes and some metadata in the dataset). With that, PyTables probably can access and *modify* most of the HDF5 files out there.
- *Data compression:* Supports data compression (using the *Zlib*, *LZO* and *bzip2* compression libraries) out of the box. This is important when you have repetitive data patterns and don't want to spend time searching for an optimized way to store them (saving you time spent analyzing your data organization).

- *High performance I/O*: On modern systems storing large amounts of data, tables and array objects can be read and written at a speed only limited by the performance of the underlying I/O subsystem. Moreover, if your data is compressible, even that limit is surmountable!
- *Support of files bigger than 2 GB*: PyTables automatically inherits this capability from the underlying HDF5 library (assuming your platform supports the C long long integer, or, on Windows, `__int64`).
- *Architecture-independent*: PyTables has been carefully coded (as HDF5 itself) with little-endian/big-endian byte ordering issues in mind. So, you can write a file on a big-endian machine (like a Sparc or MIPS) and read it on other little-endian machine (like an Intel or Alpha) without problems. In addition, it has been tested successfully with 64 bit platforms (Intel-64, AMD-64, PowerPC-G5, MIPS, UltraSparc) using code generated with 64 bit aware compilers.

1.2. The Object Tree

The hierarchical model of the underlying HDF5 library allows PyTables to manage tables and arrays in a tree-like structure. In order to achieve this, an *object tree* entity is *dynamically* created imitating the HDF5 structure on disk. The HDF5 objects are read by walking through this object tree. You can get a good picture of what kind of data is kept in the object by examining the *metadata* nodes.

The different nodes in the object tree are instances of PyTables classes. There are several types of classes, but the most important ones are the `Node`, `Group` and `Leaf` classes. All nodes in a PyTables tree are instances of the `Node` class. The `Group` and `Leaf` classes are descendants of `Node`. `Group` instances (referred to as *groups* from now on) are a grouping structure containing instances of zero or more groups or leaves, together with supplementary metadata. `Leaf` instances (referred to as *leaves*) are containers for actual data and can not contain further groups or leaves. The `Table`, `Array`, `CArray`, `EArray`, `VArray` and `UnImplemented` classes are descendants of `Leaf`, and inherit all its properties.

Working with groups and leaves is similar in many ways to working with directories and files on a Unix filesystem, i.e. a node (file or directory) is always a *child* of one and only one group (directory), its *parent group*¹. Inside of that group, the node is accessed by its *name*. As is the case with Unix directories and files, objects in the object tree are often referenced by giving their full (absolute) path names. In PyTables this full path can be specified either as string (such as `' / subgroup2 / table3 '`, using `/` as a parent/child separator) or as a complete object path written in a format known as the *natural name* schema (such as `file.root.subgroup2.table3`).

Support for *natural naming* is a key aspect of PyTables. It means that the names of instance variables of the node objects are the same as the names of its children². This is very *Pythonic* and intuitive in many cases. Check the tutorial [Section 3.1.6](#) for usage examples.

You should also be aware that not all the data present in a file is loaded into the object tree. Only the *metadata* (i.e. special data that describes the structure of the actual data) is loaded. The actual data is not read until you request it (by calling a method on a particular node). Using the object tree (the metadata) you can retrieve information about the objects on disk such as table names, titles, column names, data types in columns, numbers of rows, or, in the case of arrays, their shapes, typecodes, etc. You can also search through the tree for specific kinds of data then read it and process it. In a certain sense, you can think of PyTables as a tool that applies the same introspection capabilities of Python objects to large amounts of data in persistent storage.

It is worth noting that PyTables sports a *node cache system* that loads nodes on demand, and unloads nodes that have not been used for some time (following a *Least Recently Used* schema). This feature allows opening files with large hierarchies very quickly and with a low memory consumption, while retaining all the powerful browsing capabilities of the previous implementation of the object tree. See [19] for more facts about the advantages introduced by this new node cache system.

¹PyTables does not support hard links – for the moment.

²I got this simple but powerful idea from the excellent `Objectify` module by David Mertz (see [4])

To better understand the dynamic nature of this object tree entity, let's start with a sample PyTables script (which you can find in `examples/objecttree.py`) to create an HDF5 file:

```
from tables import *

class Particle(IsDescription):
    identity = StringCol(itemsize=22, dflt=" ", pos=0) # character String
    idnumber = Int16Col(dflt=1, pos = 1) # short integer
    speed    = Float32Col(dflt=1, pos = 1) # single-precision

# Open a file in "w"rite mode
fileh = openFile("objecttree.h5", mode = "w")
# Get the HDF5 root group
root = fileh.root

# Create the groups:
group1 = fileh.createGroup(root, "group1")
group2 = fileh.createGroup(root, "group2")

# Now, create an array in root group
array1 = fileh.createArray(root, "array1", ["string", "array"], "String
    array")
# Create 2 new tables in group1
table1 = fileh.createTable(group1, "table1", Particle)
table2 = fileh.createTable("/group2", "table2", Particle)
# Create the last table in group2
array2 = fileh.createArray("/group1", "array2", [1,2,3,4])

# Now, fill the tables:
for table in (table1, table2):
    # Get the record object associated with the table:
    row = table.row
    # Fill the table with 10 records
    for i in xrange(10):
        # First, assign the values to the Particle record
        row['identity'] = 'This is particle: %2d' % (i)
        row['idnumber'] = i
        row['speed'] = i * 2.
        # This injects the Record values
        row.append()

    # Flush the table buffers
    table.flush()

# Finally, close the file (this also will flush all the remaining buffers!)
fileh.close()
```

This small program creates a simple HDF5 file called `objecttree.h5` with the structure that appears in [Figure 1.1](#)³. When the file is created, the metadata in the object tree is updated in memory while the actual data is saved to disk. When you close the file the object tree is no longer available. However, when you reopen this file the object tree will be reconstructed in memory from the metadata on disk, allowing you to work with it in exactly the same way as when you originally created it.

³We have used ViTables (see [\[21\]](#)) in order to create this snapshot.

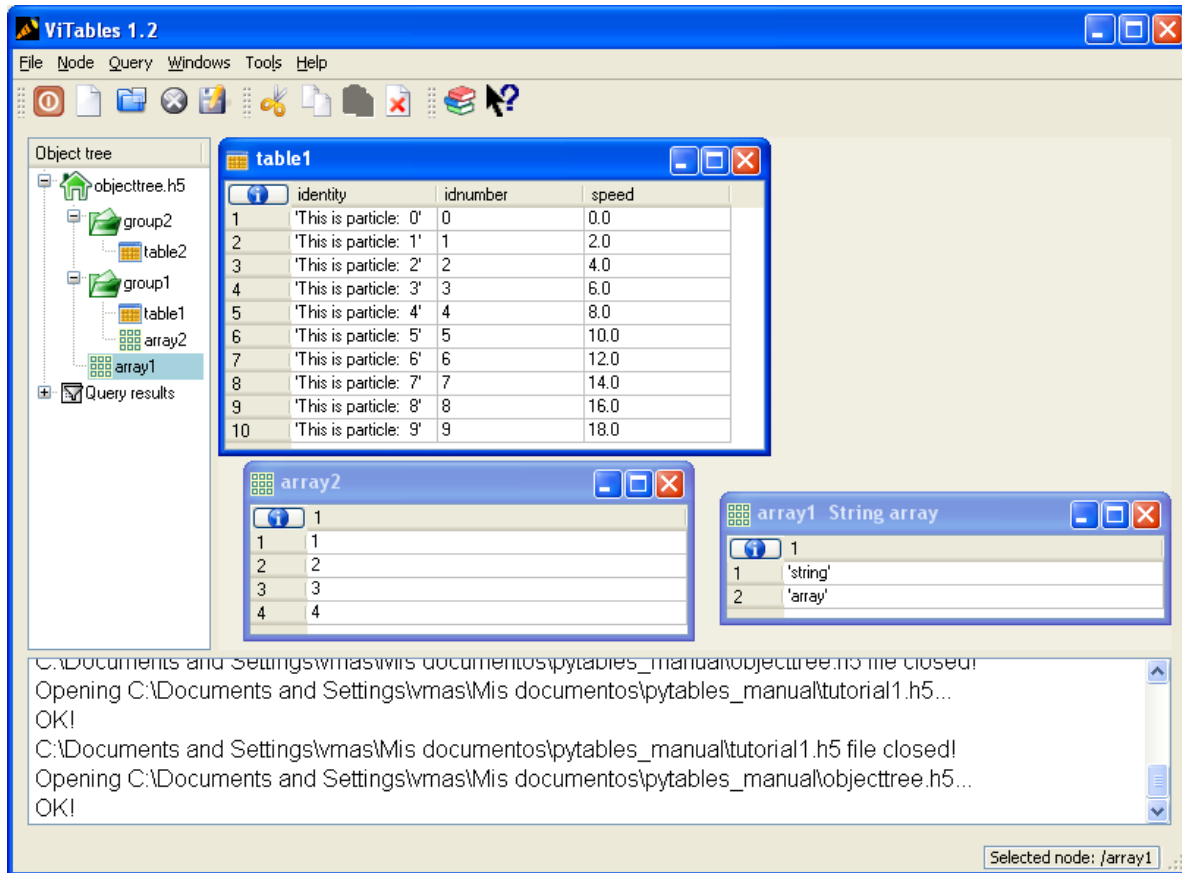


Figure 1.1. An HDF5 example with 2 subgroups, 2 tables and 1 array.

In [Figure 1.2](#) you can see an example of the object tree created when the above `objecttree.h5` file is read (in fact, such an object tree is always created when reading any supported generic HDF5 file). It is worthwhile to take your time to understand it⁴. It will help you understand the relationships of in-memory PyTables objects.

⁴Bear in mind, however, that this diagram is *not* a standard UML class diagram; it is rather meant to show the connections between the PyTables objects and some of its most important attributes and methods.

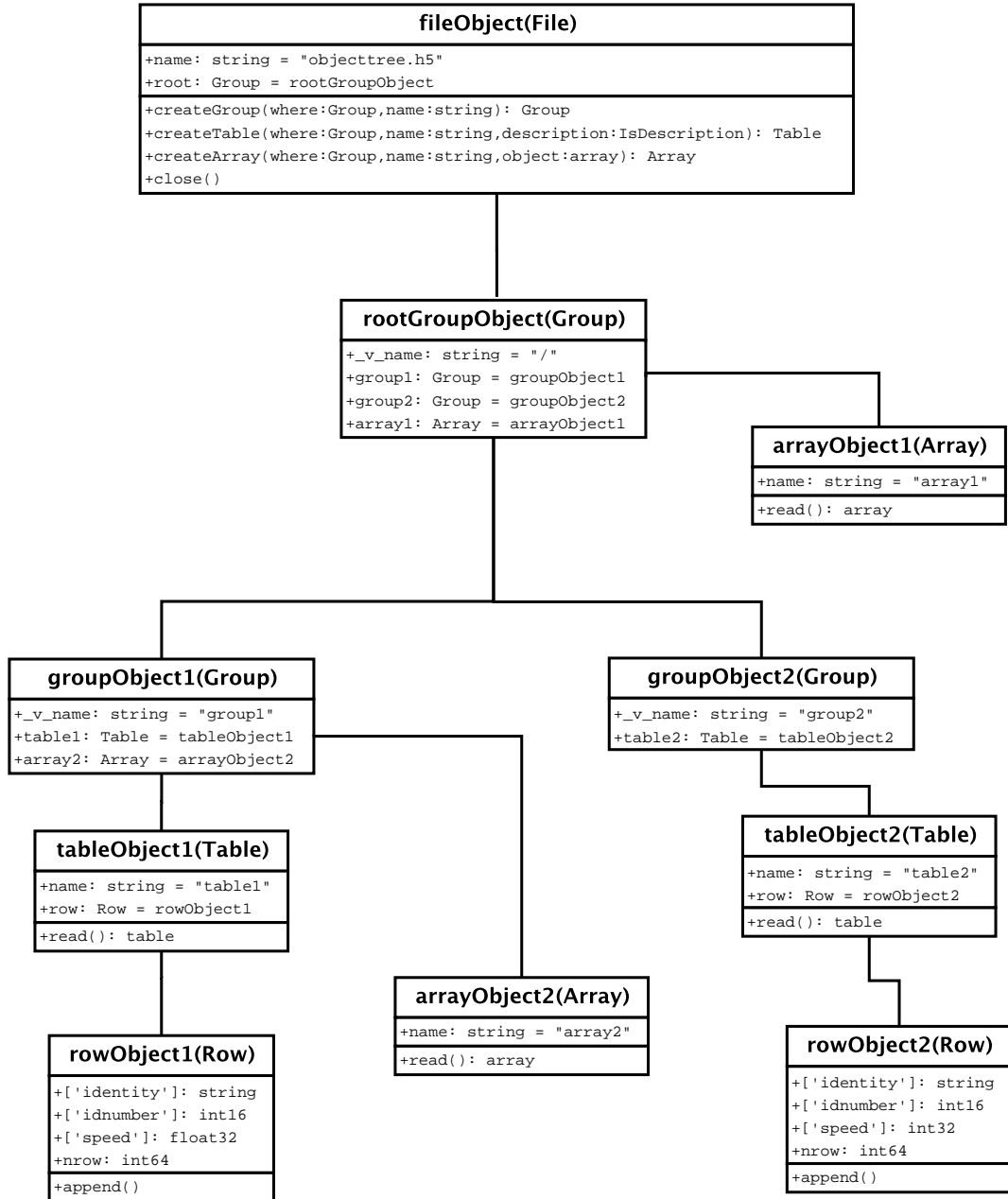


Figure 1.2. A PyTables object tree example.

Chapter 2. Installation

Make things as simple as possible, but not any simpler.

--Albert Einstein

The Python `Distutils` are used to build and install PyTables, so it is fairly simple to get the application up and running. If you want to install the package from sources you can go on reading to the next section.

However, if you are running Windows and want to install precompiled binaries, you can jump straight to [Section 2.2](#). In addition, packages are available for many different Linux distributions, for instance [T2 Project](#) [<http://www.t2-project.org/>], [Debian](#) [<http://www.debian.org/>], or [Ubuntu](#) [<http://www.ubuntu.com/>], among others. There are also packages for other Unices like [FreeBSD](#) [<http://www.freshports.org/>] or MacOSX (see [Darwinports](#) [<http://darwinports.com/>] or [Fink](#) [<http://pdb.finkproject.org/>] repositories).

2.1. Installation from source

These instructions are for both Unix/MacOS X and Windows systems. If you are using Windows, it is assumed that you have a recent version of MS Visual C++ compiler installed. A GCC compiler is assumed for Unix, but other compilers should work as well.

Extensions in PyTables have been developed in Pyrex (see [\[5\]](#)) and the C language. You can rebuild everything from scratch if you have Pyrex installed, but this is not necessary, as the Pyrex compiled source is included in the source distribution.

To compile PyTables you will need a recent version of Python, the HDF5 (C flavor) library from <http://hdfgroup.org/>, and the NumPy (see [\[8\]](#)) package. Although you won't need `numarray` (see [\[10\]](#)) or `Numeric` (see [\[9\]](#)) in order to compile PyTables, they are supported; you only need a reasonably recent version of them ($\geq 1.5.2$ for `numarray` and ≥ 24.2 for `Numeric`) if you plan on using them in your applications. If you already have `numarray` and/or `Numeric` installed, the test driver module will detect them and will run the tests for `numarray` and/or `Numeric` automatically.

2.1.1. Prerequisites

First, make sure that you have at least Python 2.4, HDF5 1.6.5 and NumPy 1.0.3 or higher installed (we are using HDF5 1.8.0 and NumPy 1.0.3.1 currently). If you don't, fetch and install them before proceeding.

Compile and install these packages (but see [Section 2.2.1](#) for instructions on how to install precompiled binaries if you are not willing to compile the prerequisites on Windows systems).

For compression (and possibly improved performance), you will need to install the `Zlib` (see [\[12\]](#)), which is also required by HDF5 as well. You may also optionally install the excellent LZO compression library (see [\[13\]](#) and [Section 5.3](#)). The high-performance bzip2 compression library can also be used with PyTables (see [\[14\]](#)).

Unix `setup.py` will detect HDF5, LZO, or bzip2 libraries and include files under `/usr` or `/usr/local`; this will cover most manual installations as well as installations from packages. If `setup.py` can not find `libhdf5` (or `liblzo`, or `libbz2` that you may wish to use) or if you have several versions of a library installed and want to use a particular one, then you can set the path to the resource in the environment, by setting the values of the `HDF5_DIR`, `LZO_DIR`, or `BZIP2_DIR` environment variables to the path to the particular resource. You may also specify the locations of the resource root directories on the `setup.py` command line. For example:

```
--hdf5=/stuff/hdf5-1.8.0
--lzo=/stuff/lzo-2.02
```

```
--bzip2=/stuff/bzip2-1.0.4
```

If your HDF5 library was built as a shared library not in the runtime load path, then you can specify the additional linker flags needed to find the shared library on the command line as well. For example:

```
--lflags="-Xlinker -rpath -Xlinker /stuff/hdf5-1.8.0/lib"
```

You may also want to try setting the `LD_LIBRARY_PATH` environment variable to point to the directory where the shared libraries can be found. Check your compiler and linker documentation as well as the Python `Distutils` documentation for the correct syntax or environment variable names.

It is also possible to link with specific libraries by setting the `LIBS` environment variable:

```
LIBS="hdf5-1.8.0 nsl"
```

Finally, you can give additional flags to your compiler by passing them to the `--cflags` flag:

```
--cflags="-w -O3"
```

In the above case, a `gcc` compiler is used and you instructed it to suppress all the warnings and set the level 3 of optimization.

Windows You can get ready-to-use Windows binaries and other development files for most of the following libraries from the GnuWin32 project (see [\[15\]](#)).

Once you have installed the prerequisites, `setup.py` needs to know where the necessary library *stub* (`.lib`) and *header* (`.h`) files are installed. You can set the path to the `include` and `dll` directories for the HDF5 (mandatory) and LZO or BZIP2 (optional) libraries in the environment, by setting the values of the `HDF5_DIR`, `LZO_DIR`, or `BZIP2_DIR` environment variables to the path to the particular resource. For example:

```
set HDF5_DIR=c:\stuff\5-165-win
set LZO_DIR=c:\stuff\lzo-1-08
set BZIP2_DIR=c:\stuff\bzip2-1-0-3
```

You may also specify the locations of the resource root directories on the `setup.py` command line. For example:

```
--hdf5=c:\stuff\5-165-win
--lzo=c:\stuff\lzo-1-08
--bzip2=c:\stuff\bzip2-1-0-3
```

2.1.2. PyTables package installation

Once you have installed the HDF5 library and the NumPy package, you can proceed with the PyTables package itself:

1. Run this command from the main PyTables distribution directory, including any extra command line arguments as discussed above:

```
python setup.py build_ext --inplace
```

Depending on the compiler flags used when compiling your Python executable, there may appear many warnings. Don't worry, almost all of them are caused by variables declared but never used. That's normal in Pyrex extensions.

2. To run the test suite, execute this command:

Unix In the `sh` shell and its variants:

```
PYTHONPATH=.:$PYTHONPATH python tables/tests/test_all.py
```

or, if you prefer:

```
PYTHONPATH=.:$PYTHONPATH python -c "import tables; tables.test()"
```

Both commands do the same thing.

Windows Open the command prompt (cmd.exe or command.com) and type:

```
set PYTHONPATH=.;%PYTHONPATH%
python tables\tests\test_all.py
```

or:

```
set PYTHONPATH=.;%PYTHONPATH%
python -c "import tables; tables.test()"
```

If you would like to see verbose output from the tests simply add the `-v` flag or the word `verbose` to the command line. You can also run only the tests in a particular test module. For example, to execute just the `test_types` test suite, you only have to specify it:

```
python tables/tests/test_types.py -v # change to backslashes for win
```

You have other options to pass to the `test_all.py` driver:

```
python tables/tests/test_all.py --heavy # change to backslashes for win
```

The command above runs every test in the test unit. Beware, it can take a lot of time, CPU and memory resources to complete.

```
python tables/tests/test_all.py --show-versions # change to backslashes for win
```

The command above shows the versions for all the packages that PyTables relies on. Please be sure to include this when reporting bugs.

```
python tables/tests/test_all.py --show-memory # only under Linux 2.6.x
```

The command above prints out the evolution of the memory consumption after each test module completion. It's useful for locating memory leaks in PyTables (or packages behind it). Only valid for Linux 2.6.x kernels.

And last, but not least, in case a test fails, please run the failing test module again and enable the verbose output:

```
python tables/tests/test_<module>.py -v verbose
```

and, very important, obtain your PyTables version information by using the `--show-versions` flag (see above) and send back both outputs to developers so that we may continue improving PyTables.

If you run into problems because Python can not load the HDF5 library or other shared libraries:

Unix Try setting the `LD_LIBRARY_PATH` or equivalent environment variable to point to the directory where the missing libraries can be found.

Windows Put the DLL libraries (`hdf5dll.dll` and, optionally, `lzol.dll` and `bzip2.dll`) in a directory listed in your `PATH` environment variable. The `setup.py` installation program will print out a warning to that effect if the libraries can not be found.

3. To install the entire PyTables Python package, change back to the root distribution directory and run the following command (make sure you have sufficient permissions to write to the directories where the PyTables files will be installed):

```
python setup.py install
```

Of course, you will need super-user privileges if you want to install PyTables on a system-protected area. You can select, though, a different place to install the package using the `--prefix` flag:

```
python setup.py install --prefix="/home/myuser/mystuff"
```

Have in mind, however, that if you use the `--prefix` flag to install in a non-standard place, you should properly setup your `PYTHONPATH` environment variable, so that the Python interpreter would be able to find your new PyTables installation.

You have more installation options available in the Distutils package. Issue a:

```
python setup.py install --help
```

for more information on that subject.

That's it! Now you can skip to the next chapter to learn how to use PyTables.

2.2. Binary installation (Windows)

This section is intended for installing precompiled binaries on Windows platforms. You may also find it useful for instructions on how to install *binary prerequisites* even if you want to compile PyTables itself on Windows.

2.2.1. Windows prerequisites

First, make sure that you have Python 2.4 or higher and NumPy 1.0.3 or higher installed (PyTables binaries have been built using NumPy 1.0.3.1). The binaries already include DLLs for HDF5 (1.8.0), zlib1 (1.2.3), szlib (2.0, uncompression support only) and bzip2 (1.0.4). The LZO DLL can't be included because of license issues (but read below for directives to install it if you want so).

To enable compression with the optional LZO library (see the [Section 5.3](#) for hints about how it may be used to improve performance), fetch and install the LZO (choose v1.x, LZO v2.x is not supported in precompiled Windows builds) from [\[15\]](#). Normally, you will only need to fetch and install the `<package>-<version>-bin.zip` file and copy the `lzol.dll` file in a directory in the `PATH` environment variable (for example `C:\WINDOWS\SYSTEM32`) or `python_installation_path\Lib\site-packages\tables` (the last directory may not exist yet, so if you want to install the DLL there, you should do so *after* installing the PyTables package), so that it can be found by the PyTables extensions.

Please note that PyTables has internal machinery for dealing with uninstalled optional compression libraries, so, you don't need to install the LZO dynamic library if you don't want to.

2.2.2. PyTables package installation

Download the `tables-<version>.win32-py<version>.exe` file and execute it.

You can (and *you should*) test your installation by running the next commands:

```
>>> import tables
>>> tables.test()
```

on your favorite python shell. If all the tests pass (possibly with a few warnings, related to the potential unavailability of LZO lib) you already have a working, well-tested copy of PyTables installed! If any test fails, please copy the output of the error messages as well as the output of:

```
>>> tables.print_versions()
```

and mail them to the developers so that the problem can be fixed in future releases.

You can proceed now to the next chapter to see how to use PyTables.

Chapter 3. Tutorials

Seràs la clau que obre tots els panys,
seràs la llum, la llum il.limitada,
seràs confí on l'aurora comença,
seràs forment, escala il.luminada!

--Lyrics: Vicent Andrés i Estellés. Music: Ovidi Montllor, *M'aclame a tu*

This chapter consists of a series of simple yet comprehensive tutorials that will enable you to understand PyTables' main features. If you would like more information about some particular instance variable, global function, or method, look at the doc strings or go to the library reference in [Chapter 4](#). If you are reading this in PDF or HTML formats, follow the corresponding hyperlink near each newly introduced entity.

Please note that throughout this document the terms *column* and *field* will be used interchangeably, as will the terms *row* and *record*.

3.1. Getting started

In this section, we will see how to define our own records in Python and save collections of them (i.e. a *table*) into a file. Then we will select some of the data in the table using Python cuts and create NumPy arrays to store this selection as separate objects in a tree.

In *examples/tutorial1-1.py* you will find the working version of all the code in this section. Nonetheless, this tutorial series has been written to allow you reproduce it in a Python interactive console. I encourage you to do parallel testing and inspect the created objects (variables, docs, children objects, etc.) during the course of the tutorial!

3.1.1. Importing tables objects

Before starting you need to import the public objects in the `tables` package. You normally do that by executing:

```
>>> import tables
```

This is the recommended way to import `tables` if you don't want to pollute your namespace. However, PyTables has a contained set of first-level primitives, so you may consider using the alternative:

```
>>> from tables import *
```

If you are going to work with NumPy (or `numarray` or `Numeric`) arrays (and normally, you will) you will also need to import functions from them. So most PyTables programs begin with:

```
>>> import tables          # but in this tutorial we use "from tables import *"
>>> import numpy           # or "import numarray" or "import Numeric"
```

3.1.2. Declaring a Column Descriptor

Now, imagine that we have a particle detector and we want to create a table object in order to save data retrieved from it. You need first to define the table, the number of columns it has, what kind of object is contained in each column, and so on.

Our particle detector has a TDC (Time to Digital Converter) counter with a dynamic range of 8 bits and an ADC (Analogical to Digital Converter) with a range of 16 bits. For these values, we will define 2 fields in our record object called `TDCcount` and `ADCcount`. We also want to save the grid position in which the particle has been detected, so we will add two new fields called `grid_i` and `grid_j`. Our instrumentation also can obtain the pressure and energy of the particle. The resolution of the pressure-gauge allows us to use a simple-precision float to store pressure readings, while the energy value will need a double-precision float. Finally, to track the particle we want to assign it a name to identify the kind of the particle it is and a unique numeric identifier. So we will add two more fields: `name` will be a string of up to 16 characters, and `idnumber` will be an integer of 64 bits (to allow us to store records for extremely large numbers of particles).

Having determined our columns and their types, we can now declare a new `Particle` class that will contain all this information:

```
>>> from tables import *
>>> class Particle(IsDescription):
    name      = StringCol(16)      # 16-character String
    idnumber  = Int64Col()         # Signed 64-bit integer
    ADCcount  = UInt16Col()        # Unsigned short integer
    TDCcount  = UInt8Col()         # unsigned byte
    grid_i    = Int32Col()         # 32-bit integer
    grid_j    = Int32Col()         # 32-bit integer
    pressure  = Float32Col()       # float (single-precision)
    energy    = Float64Col()       # double (double-precision)

>>>
```

This definition class is self-explanatory. Basically, you declare a class variable for each field you need. As its value you assign an instance of the appropriate `Col` subclass, according to the kind of column defined (the data type, the length, the shape, etc). See the [Section 4.13.2](#) for a complete description of these subclasses. See also [Appendix A](#) for a list of data types supported by the `Col` constructor.

From now on, we can use `Particle` instances as a descriptor for our detector data table. We will see later on how to pass this object to construct the table. But first, we must create a file where all the actual data pushed into our table will be saved.

3.1.3. Creating a PyTables file from scratch

Use the first-level `openFile` function (see [description](#)) to create a PyTables file:

```
>>> h5file = openFile("tutorial1.h5", mode = "w", title = "Test file")
```

`openFile()` (see [description](#)) is one of the objects imported by the `"from tables import *"` statement. Here, we are saying that we want to create a new file in the current working directory called `"tutorial1.h5"` in `"w"`rite mode and with an descriptive title string (`"Test file"`). This function attempts to open the file, and if successful, returns the `File` (see [Section 4.2](#)) object instance `h5file`. The root of the object tree is specified in the instance's `root` attribute.

3.1.4. Creating a new group

Now, to better organize our data, we will create a group called *detector* that branches from the root node. We will save our particle data table in this group.

```
>>> group = h5file.createGroup("/", 'detector', 'Detector information')
```

Here, we have taken the `File` instance `h5file` and invoked its `createGroup()` method (see [description](#)) to create a new group called *detector* branching from `"/"` (another way to refer to the `h5file.root` object we mentioned above). This will create a new `Group` (see [Section 4.4](#)) object instance that will be assigned to the variable `group`.

3.1.5. Creating a new table

Let's now create a `Table` (see [Section 4.6](#)) object as a branch off the newly-created group. We do that by calling the `createTable` (see [description](#)) method of the `h5file` object:

```
>>> table = h5file.createTable(group, 'readout', Particle, "Readout example")
```

We create the `Table` instance under `group`. We assign this table the node name `"readout"`. The `Particle` class declared before is the *description* parameter (to define the columns of the table) and finally we set `"Readout example"` as the `Table` title. With all this information, a new `Table` instance is created and assigned to the variable `table`.

If you are curious about how the object tree looks right now, simply print the `File` instance variable `h5file`, and examine the output:

```
>>> print h5file
tutorial1.h5 (File) 'Test file'
Last modif.: 'Wed Mar  7 11:06:12 2007'
Object Tree:
/ (RootGroup) 'Test file'
/detector (Group) 'Detector information'
/detector/readout (Table(0L,)) 'Readout example'
```

As you can see, a dump of the object tree is displayed. It's easy to see the `Group` and `Table` objects we have just created. If you want more information, just type the variable containing the `File` instance:

```
>>> h5file
File(filename='tutorial1.h5', title='Test file', mode='w', trMap={},
      rootUEP='/', filters=Filters(complevel=0, shuffle=False, fletcher32=False))
/ (RootGroup) 'Test file'
/detector (Group) 'Detector information'
/detector/readout (Table(0L,)) 'Readout example'
  description := {
    "ADCcount": UInt16Col(shape=(), dflt=0, pos=0),
    "TDCcount": UInt8Col(shape=(), dflt=0, pos=1),
    "energy": Float64Col(shape=(), dflt=0.0, pos=2),
    "grid_i": Int32Col(shape=(), dflt=0, pos=3),
    "grid_j": Int32Col(shape=(), dflt=0, pos=4),
    "idnumber": Int64Col(shape=(), dflt=0, pos=5),
    "name": StringCol(itemsize=16, shape=(), dflt='', pos=6),
    "pressure": Float32Col(shape=(), dflt=0.0, pos=7)}
  byteorder := 'little'
  chunkshape := (87L,)
```

More detailed information is displayed about each object in the tree. Note how `Particle`, our table descriptor class, is printed as part of the *readout* table description information. In general, you can obtain much more information about the objects and their children by just printing them. That introspection capability is very useful, and I recommend that you use it extensively.

The time has come to fill this table with some values. First we will get a pointer to the `Row` (see [Section 4.6.7](#)) instance of this table instance:


```
>>> particle = table.row
```

The row attribute of `table` points to the Row instance that will be used to write data rows into the table. We write data simply by assigning the Row instance the values for each row as if it were a dictionary (although it is actually an *extension class*), using the column names as keys.

Below is an example of how to write rows:

```
>>> for i in xrange(10):
    particle['name'] = 'Particle: %6d' % (i)
    particle['TDCcount'] = i % 256
    particle['ADCcount'] = (i * 256) % (1 << 16)
    particle['grid_i'] = i
    particle['grid_j'] = 10 - i
    particle['pressure'] = float(i*i)
    particle['energy'] = float(particle['pressure'] ** 4)
    particle['idnumber'] = i * (2 ** 34)
    # Insert a new particle record
    particle.append()

>>>
```

This code should be easy to understand. The lines inside the loop just assign values to the different columns in the Row instance `particle` (see [Section 4.6.7](#)). A call to its `append()` method writes this information to the table I/O buffer.

After we have processed all our data, we should flush the table's I/O buffer if we want to write all this data to disk. We achieve that by calling the `table.flush()` method.

```
>>> table.flush()
```

Remember, flushing a table is a *very important* step as it will not only help to maintain the integrity of your file, but also will free valuable memory resources (i.e. internal buffers) that your program may need for other things.

3.1.6. Reading (and selecting) data in a table

Ok. We have our data on disk, and now we need to access it and select from specific columns the values we are interested in. See the example below:

```
>>> table = h5file.root.detector.readout
>>> pressure = [ x['pressure'] for x in table.iterrows()
                if x['TDCcount'] > 3 and 20 <= x['pressure'] < 50 ]
>>> pressure
[25.0, 36.0, 49.0]
```

The first line creates a "shortcut" to the *readout* table deeper on the object tree. As you can see, we use the *natural naming* schema to access it. We also could have used the `h5file.getNode()` method, as we will do later on.

You will recognize the last two lines as a Python list comprehension. It loops over the rows in *table* as they are provided by the `table.iterrows()` iterator (see [description](#)). The iterator returns values until all the data in table is exhausted. These rows are filtered using the expression:

```
x['TDCcount'] > 3 and 20 <= x['pressure'] < 50
```

So, we are selecting the values of the *pressure* column from filtered records to create the final list and assign it to *pressure* variable.

We could have used a normal `for` loop to accomplish the same purpose, but I find comprehension syntax to be more compact and elegant.

Let's select the name column for the same set of cuts:

```
>>> names = [ x['name'] for x in table
              if x['TDCcount'] > 3 and 20 <= x['pressure'] < 50 ]
>>> names
['Particle:      5', 'Particle:      6', 'Particle:      7']
```

Note how we have omitted the `iterrows()` call in the list comprehension. The `Table` class has an implementation of the special method `__iter__()` that iterates over all the rows in the table. In fact, `iterrows()` internally calls this special `__iter__()` method. Accessing all the rows in a table using this method is very convenient, especially when working with the data interactively.

PyTables do offer other, more powerful ways of performing selections which may be more suitable if you have very large tables or if you need very high query speeds. They are called *in-kernel* and *indexed* queries, and you can use them through `Table.where()` (see [description](#)) and other related methods. See [Appendix B](#) and [Section 5.2](#) for more information on in-kernel and indexed selections.

That's enough about selections for now. The next section will show you how to save these selected results to a file.

3.1.7. Creating new array objects

In order to separate the selected data from the mass of detector data, we will create a new group `columns` branching off the root group. Afterwards, under this group, we will create two arrays that will contain the selected data. First, we create the group:

```
>>> gcolumns = h5file.createGroup(h5file.root, "columns", "Pressure and Name")
```

Note that this time we have specified the first parameter using *natural naming* (`h5file.root`) instead of with an absolute path string (`"/"`).

Now, create the first of the two `Array` objects we've just mentioned:

```
>>> h5file.createArray(gcolumns, 'pressure', array(pressure),
                      "Pressure column selection")
/cOLUMNS/pressure (Array(3,)) 'Pressure column selection'
  atom := Float64Atom(shape=(), dflt=0.0)
  maindim := 0
  flavor := 'numpy'
  byteorder := 'little'
  chunkshape := None
```

We already know the first two parameters of the `createArray` (see [description](#)) methods (these are the same as the first two in `createTable`): they are the parent group *where* `Array` will be created and the `Array` instance *name*. The third parameter is the *object* we want to save to disk. In this case, it is a NumPy array that is built from the selection list we created before. The fourth parameter is the *title*.

Now, we will save the second array. It contains the list of strings we selected before: we save this object as-is, with no further conversion.

```
>>> h5file.createArray(gcolumns, 'name', names, "Name column selection")
/cOLUMNS/name (Array(3,)) 'Name column selection'
  atom := StringAtom(itemsizes=16, shape=(), dflt='')
```

```

maindim := 0
flavor := 'python'
byteorder := 'irrelevant'
chunkshape := None

```

As you can see, `createArray()` accepts *names* (which is a regular Python list) as an *object* parameter. Actually, it accepts a variety of different regular objects (see [description](#)) as parameters. The `flavor` attribute (see the output above) saves the original kind of object that was saved. Based on this *flavor*, PyTables will be able to retrieve exactly the same object from disk later on.

Note that in these examples, the `createArray` method returns an `Array` instance that is not assigned to any variable. Don't worry, this is intentional to show the kind of object we have created by displaying its representation. The `Array` objects have been attached to the object tree and saved to disk, as you can see if you print the complete object tree:

```

>>> print h5file
tutorial1.h5 (File) 'Test file'
Last modif.: 'Wed Mar  7 19:40:44 2007'
Object Tree:
/ (RootGroup) 'Test file'
/columns (Group) 'Pressure and Name'
/columns/name (Array(3,)) 'Name column selection'
/columns/pressure (Array(3,)) 'Pressure column selection'
/detector (Group) 'Detector information'
/detector/readout (Table(10L,)) 'Readout example'

```

3.1.8. Closing the file and looking at its content

To finish this first tutorial, we use the `close` method of the `h5file File` object to close the file before exiting Python:

```

>>> h5file.close()
>>> ^D
$

```

You have now created your first PyTables file with a table and two arrays. You can examine it with any generic HDF5 tool, such as `h5dump` or `h5ls`. Here is what the `tutorial1.h5` looks like when read with the `h5ls` program:

```

$ h5ls -rd tutorial1.h5
/columns                               Group
/columns/name                         Dataset {3}
  Data:
    (0) "Particle:      5", "Particle:      6", "Particle:      7"
/columns/pressure                     Dataset {3}
  Data:
    (0) 25, 36, 49
/detector                             Group
/detector/readout                     Dataset {10/Inf}
  Data:
    (0) {0, 0, 0, 0, 10, 0, "Particle:      0", 0},
    (1) {256, 1, 1, 1, 9, 17179869184, "Particle:      1", 1},
    (2) {512, 2, 256, 2, 8, 34359738368, "Particle:      2", 4},
    (3) {768, 3, 6561, 3, 7, 51539607552, "Particle:      3", 9},
    (4) {1024, 4, 65536, 4, 6, 68719476736, "Particle:      4", 16},
    (5) {1280, 5, 390625, 5, 5, 85899345920, "Particle:      5", 25},
    (6) {1536, 6, 1679616, 6, 4, 103079215104, "Particle:      6", 36},

```

```
(7) {1792, 7, 5764801, 7, 3, 120259084288, "Particle: 7", 49},
(8) {2048, 8, 16777216, 8, 2, 137438953472, "Particle: 8", 64},
(9) {2304, 9, 43046721, 9, 1, 154618822656, "Particle: 9", 81}
```

Here's the output as displayed by the "ptdump" PyTables utility (located in `utils/` directory):

```
$ ptdump tutorial1.h5
tutorial1.h5 (File) 'Test file'
Last modif.: 'Wed Mar  7 19:50:57 2007'
Object Tree:
/ (RootGroup) 'Test file'
/columns (Group) 'Pressure and Name'
/columns/name (Array(3L,)) 'Name column selection'
/columns/pressure (Array(3L,)) 'Pressure column selection'
/detector (Group) 'Detector information'
/detector/readout (Table(10L,)) 'Readout example'
```

You can pass the `-v` or `-d` options to `ptdump` if you want more verbosity. Try them out!

Also, in [Figure 3.1](#), you can admire how the `tutorial1.h5` looks like using the [ViTables](http://www.carabos.com/products/vitables.html) [http://www.carabos.com/products/vitables.html] graphical interface .

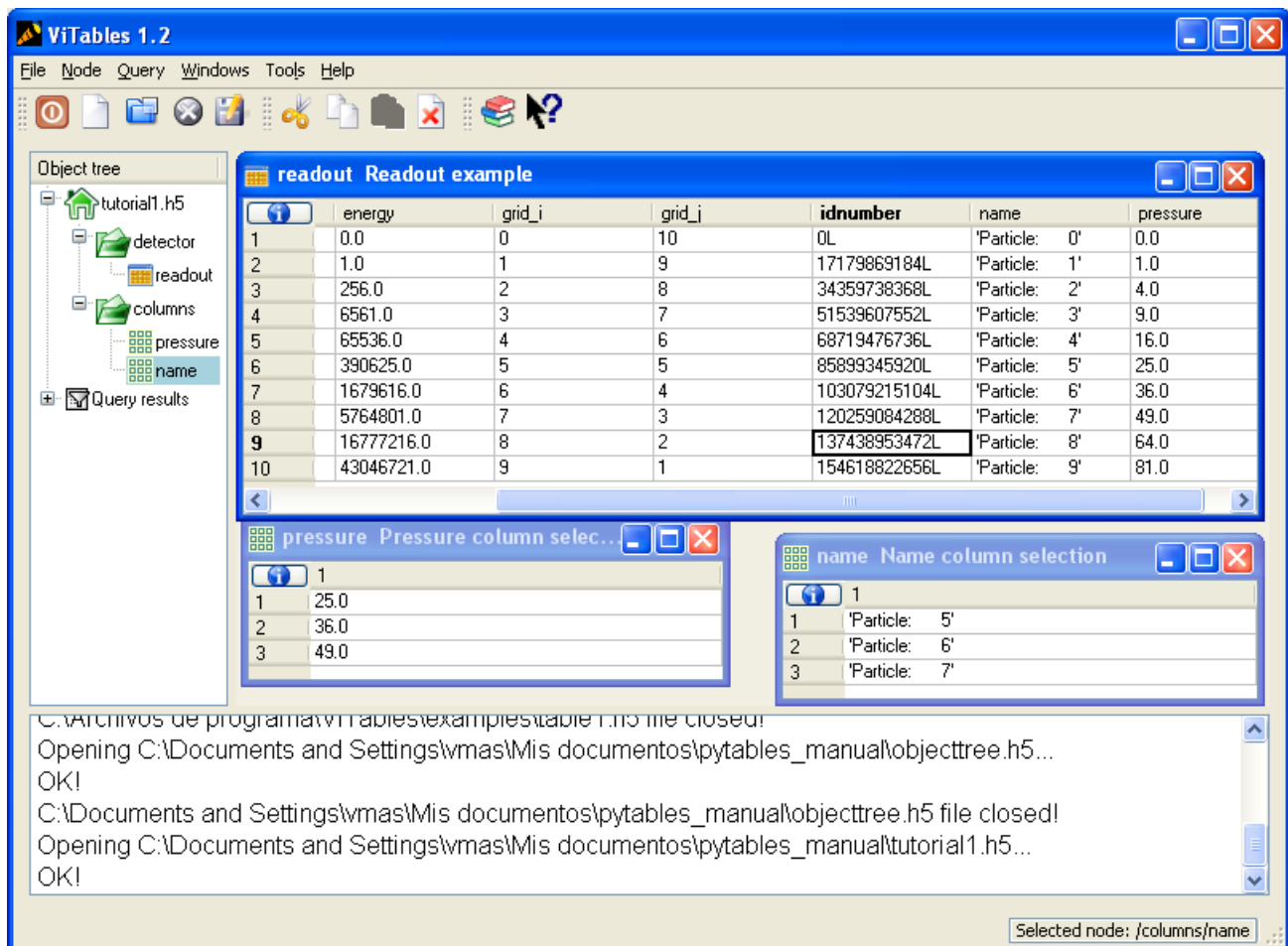


Figure 3.1. The initial version of the data file for tutorial 1, with a view of the data objects.

3.2. Browsing the *object tree*

In this section, we will learn how to browse the tree and retrieve data and also meta-information about the actual data.

In *examples/tutorial1-2.py* you will find the working version of all the code in this section. As before, you are encouraged to use a python shell and inspect the object tree during the course of the tutorial.

3.2.1. Traversing the object tree

Let's start by opening the file we created in last tutorial section.

```
>>> h5file = openFile("tutorial1.h5", "a")
```

This time, we have opened the file in "a"ppend mode. We use this mode to add more information to the file.

PyTables, following the Python tradition, offers powerful introspection capabilities, i.e. you can easily ask information about any component of the object tree as well as search the tree.

To start with, you can get a preliminary overview of the object tree by simply printing the existing File instance:

```
>>> print h5file
tutorial1.h5 (File) 'Test file'
Last modif.: 'Wed Mar  7 19:50:57 2007'
Object Tree:
/ (RootGroup) 'Test file'
/columns (Group) 'Pressure and Name'
/columns/name (Array(3L,)) 'Name column selection'
/columns/pressure (Array(3L,)) 'Pressure column selection'
/detector (Group) 'Detector information'
/detector/readout (Table(10L,)) 'Readout example'
```

It looks like all of our objects are there. Now let's make use of the File iterator to see how to list all the nodes in the object tree:

```
>>> for node in h5file:
    print node

/ (RootGroup) 'Test file'
/columns (Group) 'Pressure and Name'
/detector (Group) 'Detector information'
/columns/name (Array(3L,)) 'Name column selection'
/columns/pressure (Array(3L,)) 'Pressure column selection'
/detector/readout (Table(10L,)) 'Readout example'
```

We can use the walkGroups method (see [description](#)) of the File class to list only the *groups* on tree:

```
>>> for group in h5file.walkGroups():
    print group

/ (RootGroup) 'Test file'
/columns (Group) 'Pressure and Name'
/detector (Group) 'Detector information'
```

Note that walkGroups() actually returns an *iterator*, not a list of objects. Using this iterator with the listNodes() method is a powerful combination. Let's see an example listing of all the arrays in the tree:

```
>>> for group in h5file.walkGroups("/"):
    for array in h5file.listNodes(group, classname='Array'):
        print array

/columns/name (Array(3,)) 'Name column selection'
/columns/pressure (Array(3,)) 'Pressure column selection'
```

`listNodes()` (see [description](#)) returns a list containing all the nodes hanging off a specific Group. If the *classname* keyword is specified, the method will filter out all instances which are not descendants of the class. We have asked for only Array instances. There exist also an iterator counterpart called `iterNodes()` (see [description](#)) that might be handy in some situations, like for example when dealing with groups with a large number of nodes behind it.

We can combine both calls by using the `walkNodes(where, classname)` special method of the File object (see [description](#)). For example:

```
>>> for array in h5file.walkNodes("/", "Array"):
    print array

/columns/name (Array(3,)) 'Name column selection'
/columns/pressure (Array(3,)) 'Pressure column selection'
```

This is a nice shortcut when working interactively.

Finally, we will list all the Leaf, i.e. Table and Array instances (see [Section 4.5](#) for detailed information on Leaf class), in the `/detector` group. Note that only one instance of the Table class (i.e. `readout`) will be selected in this group (as should be the case):

```
>>> for leaf in h5file.root.detector._f_walkNodes('Leaf'):
    print leaf

/detector/readout (Table(10L,)) 'Readout example'
```

We have used a call to the `Group._f_walkNodes(classname)` method (see [description](#)), using the *natural naming* path specification.

Of course you can do more sophisticated node selections using these powerful methods. But first, let's take a look at some important PyTables object instance variables.

3.2.2. Setting and getting user attributes

PyTables provides an easy and concise way to complement the meaning of your node objects on the tree by using the `AttributeSet` class (see [Section 4.12](#)). You can access this object through the standard attribute `attrs` in Leaf nodes and `_v_attrs` in Group nodes.

For example, let's imagine that we want to save the date indicating when the data in `/detector/readout` table has been acquired, as well as the temperature during the gathering process:

```
>>> table = h5file.root.detector.readout
>>> table.attrs.gath_date = "Wed, 06/12/2003 18:33"
>>> table.attrs.temperature = 18.4
>>> table.attrs.temp_scale = "Celsius"
```

Now, let's set a somewhat more complex attribute in the `/detector` group:

```
>>> detector = h5file.root.detector
>>> detector._v_attrs.stuff = [5, (2.3, 4.5), "Integer and tuple"]
```

Note how the `AttributeSet` instance is accessed with the `_v_attrs` attribute because `detector` is a `Group` node. In general, you can save any standard Python data structure as an attribute node. See [Section 4.12](#) for a more detailed explanation of how they are serialized for export to disk.

Retrieving the attributes is equally simple:

```
>>> table.attrs.gath_date
'Wed, 06/12/2003 18:33'
>>> table.attrs.temperature
18.399999999999999
>>> table.attrs.temp_scale
'Celsius'
>>> detector._v_attrs.stuff
[5, (2.2999999999999998, 4.5), 'Integer and tuple']
```

You can probably guess how to delete attributes:

```
>>> del table.attrs.gath_date
```

If you want to examine the current user attribute set of `/detector/table`, you can print its representation (try hitting the `TAB` key twice if you are on a Unix Python console with the `rlcompleter` module active):

```
>>> table.attrs
/detector/readout._v_attrs (AttributeSet), 23 attributes:
[CLASS := 'TABLE',
 FIELD_0_FILL := 0,
 FIELD_0_NAME := 'ADCcount',
 FIELD_1_FILL := 0,
 FIELD_1_NAME := 'TDCcount',
 FIELD_2_FILL := 0.0,
 FIELD_2_NAME := 'energy',
 FIELD_3_FILL := 0,
 FIELD_3_NAME := 'grid_i',
 FIELD_4_FILL := 0,
 FIELD_4_NAME := 'grid_j',
 FIELD_5_FILL := 0,
 FIELD_5_NAME := 'idnumber',
 FIELD_6_FILL := '',
 FIELD_6_NAME := 'name',
 FIELD_7_FILL := 0.0,
 FIELD_7_NAME := 'pressure',
 FLAVOR := 'numpy',
 NROWS := 10,
 TITLE := 'Readout example',
 VERSION := '2.6',
 temp_scale := 'Celsius',
 temperature := 18.399999999999999]
```

We've got all the attributes (including the *system* attributes). You can get a list of *all* attributes or only the *user* or *system* attributes with the `_f_list()` method.

```
>>> print table.attrs._f_list("all")
['CLASS', 'FIELD_0_FILL', 'FIELD_0_NAME', 'FIELD_1_FILL', 'FIELD_1_NAME',
 'FIELD_2_FILL', 'FIELD_2_NAME', 'FIELD_3_FILL', 'FIELD_3_NAME',
 'FIELD_4_FILL',
```

```
'FIELD_4_NAME', 'FIELD_5_FILL', 'FIELD_5_NAME', 'FIELD_6_FILL',
'FIELD_6_NAME',
'FIELD_7_FILL', 'FIELD_7_NAME', 'FLAVOR', 'NROWS', 'TITLE', 'VERSION',
'temp_scale', 'temperature']
>>> print table.attrs._f_list("user")
['temp_scale', 'temperature']
>>> print table.attrs._f_list("sys")
['CLASS', 'FIELD_0_FILL', 'FIELD_0_NAME', 'FIELD_1_FILL', 'FIELD_1_NAME',
'FIELD_2_FILL', 'FIELD_2_NAME', 'FIELD_3_FILL', 'FIELD_3_NAME',
'FIELD_4_FILL',
'FIELD_4_NAME', 'FIELD_5_FILL', 'FIELD_5_NAME', 'FIELD_6_FILL',
'FIELD_6_NAME',
'FIELD_7_FILL', 'FIELD_7_NAME', 'FLAVOR', 'NROWS', 'TITLE', 'VERSION']
```

You can also rename attributes:

```
>>> table.attrs._f_rename("temp_scale", "tempScale")
>>> print table.attrs._f_list()
['tempScale', 'temperature']
```

And, from PyTables 2.0 on, you are allowed also to set, delete or rename system attributes:

```
>>> table.attrs._f_rename("VERSION", "version")
>>> table.attrs.VERSION
Traceback (most recent call last):
  File "<stdin>", line 1, in <module>
  File "tables/attributeset.py", line 222, in __getattr__
    (name, self._v_nodePath)
AttributeError: Attribute 'VERSION' does not exist in node: '/detector/
readout'
>>> table.attrs.version
'2.6'
```

Caveat emptor: you must be careful when modifying system attributes because you may end fooling PyTables and ultimately getting unwanted behaviour. Use this only if you know what are you doing.

So, given the caveat above, we will proceed to restore the original name of VERSION attribute:

```
>>> table.attrs._f_rename("version", "VERSION")
>>> table.attrs.VERSION
'2.6'
```

Ok. that's better. If you would terminate your session now, you would be able to use the `h5ls` command to read the `/detector/readout` attributes from the file written to disk:

```
$ h5ls -vr tutorial1.h5/detector/readout
Opened "tutorial1.h5" with sec2 driver.
/detector/readout      Dataset {10/Inf}
  Attribute: CLASS      scalar
    Type:      6-byte null-terminated ASCII string
    Data:      "TABLE"
  Attribute: VERSION    scalar
    Type:      4-byte null-terminated ASCII string
    Data:      "2.6"
  Attribute: TITLE      scalar
```



```

    Type:      16-byte null-terminated ASCII string
    Data:      "Readout example"
Attribute: NROWS      scalar
    Type:      native long long
    Data:      10
Attribute: FIELD_0_NAME scalar
    Type:      9-byte null-terminated ASCII string
    Data:      "ADCCount"
Attribute: FIELD_1_NAME scalar
    Type:      9-byte null-terminated ASCII string
    Data:      "TDCcount"
Attribute: FIELD_2_NAME scalar
    Type:      7-byte null-terminated ASCII string
    Data:      "energy"
Attribute: FIELD_3_NAME scalar
    Type:      7-byte null-terminated ASCII string
    Data:      "grid_i"
Attribute: FIELD_4_NAME scalar
    Type:      7-byte null-terminated ASCII string
    Data:      "grid_j"
Attribute: FIELD_5_NAME scalar
    Type:      9-byte null-terminated ASCII string
    Data:      "idnumber"
Attribute: FIELD_6_NAME scalar
    Type:      5-byte null-terminated ASCII string
    Data:      "name"
Attribute: FIELD_7_NAME scalar
    Type:      9-byte null-terminated ASCII string
    Data:      "pressure"
Attribute: FLAVOR      scalar
    Type:      5-byte null-terminated ASCII string
    Data:      "numpy"
Attribute: tempScale scalar
    Type:      7-byte null-terminated ASCII string
    Data:      "Celsius"
Attribute: temperature scalar
    Type:      native double
    Data:      18.4
Location: 0:1:0:1952
Links:      1
Modified: 2006-12-11 10:35:13 CET
Chunks:      {85} 3995 bytes
Storage: 470 logical bytes, 3995 allocated bytes, 11.76% utilization
Type:      struct {
                "ADCCount"          +0      native unsigned short
                "TDCcount"          +2      native unsigned char
                "energy"            +3      native double
                "grid_i"            +11     native int
                "grid_j"            +15     native int
                "idnumber"          +19     native long long
                "name"              +27     16-byte null-terminated ASCII
string
                "pressure"          +43     native float
            } 47 bytes

```

Attributes are a useful mechanism to add persistent (meta) information to your data.

3.2.3. Getting object metadata

Each object in PyTables has *metadata* information about the data in the file. Normally this *meta-information* is accessible through the node instance variables. Let's take a look at some examples:

```
>>> print "Object:", table
Object: /detector/readout (Table(10L,)) 'Readout example'
>>> print "Table name:", table.name
Table name: readout
>>> print "Table title:", table.title
Table title: Readout example
>>> print "Number of rows in table:", table.nrows
Number of rows in table: 10
>>> print "Table variable names with their type and shape:"
Table variable names with their type and shape:
>>> for name in table.colnames:
    print name, ' := %s, %s' % (table.coldtypes[name],
                                table.coldtypes[name].shape)

ADCcount := uint16, ()
TDCcount := uint8, ()
energy := float64, ()
grid_i := int32, ()
grid_j := int32, ()
idnumber := int64, ()
name := |S16, ()
pressure := float32, ()
```

Here, the name, title, nrows, colnames and coldtypes attributes (see [Section 4.6.1](#) for a complete attribute list) of the Table object gives us quite a bit of information about the table data.

You can interactively retrieve general information about the public objects in PyTables by asking for help:

```
>>> help(table)
Help on Table in module tables.table:

class Table(tableExtension.Table, tables.leaf.Leaf)
|   This class represents heterogeneous datasets in an HDF5 file.
|
|   Tables are leaves (see the `Leaf` class) whose data consists of a
|   unidimensional sequence of *rows*, where each row contains one or
|   more *fields*. Fields have an associated unique *name* and
|   *position*, with the first field having position 0. All rows have
|   the same fields, which are arranged in *columns*.
[snip]
|
|   Instance variables
|   -----
|
|   The following instance variables are provided in addition to those
|   in `Leaf`. Please note that there are several ``col*`` dictionaries
|   to ease retrieving information about a column directly by its path
|   name, avoiding the need to walk through `Table.description` or
```

```

    `Table.cols`.

    autoIndex
        Automatically keep column indexes up to date?

        Setting this value states whether existing indexes should be
        automatically updated after an append operation or recomputed
        after an index-invalidating operation (i.e. removal and
        modification of rows). The default is true.
[snip]
    rowsize
        The size in bytes of each row in the table.

    Public methods -- reading
    -----

    * col(name)
    * iterrows([start][, stop][, step])
    * itersequence(sequence[, sort])
    * read([start][, stop][, step][, field][, coords])
    * readCoordinates(coords[, field])
    * __getitem__(key)
    * __iter__()

    Public methods -- writing
    -----

    * append(rows)
    * modifyColumn([start][, stop][, step][, column][, colname])
[snip]

```

Try getting help with other object docs by yourself:

```

>>> help(h5file)
>>> help(table.removeRows)

```

To examine metadata in the `/columns/pressure` Array object:

```

>>> pressureObject = h5file.getNode("/columns", "pressure")
>>> print "Info on the object:", repr(pressureObject)
Info on the object: /columns/pressure (Array(3L,)) 'Pressure column selection'
  atom := Float64Atom(shape=(), dflt=0.0)
  maindim := 0
  flavor := 'numpy'
  byteorder := 'little'
  chunkshape := None
>>> print "  shape: ==>", pressureObject.shape
  shape: ==> (3L,)
>>> print "  title: ==>", pressureObject.title
  title: ==> Pressure column selection
>>> print "  atom: ==>", pressureObject.atom
  atom: ==> Float64Atom(shape=(), dflt=0.0)

```

Observe that we have used the `getNode()` method of the `File` class to access a node in the tree, instead of the natural naming method. Both are useful, and depending on the context you will prefer one or the other. `getNode()`

has the advantage that it can get a node from the pathname string (as in this example) and can also act as a filter to show only nodes in a particular location that are instances of class *classname*. In general, however, I consider natural naming to be more elegant and easier to use, especially if you are using the name completion capability present in interactive console. Try this powerful combination of natural naming and completion capabilities present in most Python consoles, and see how pleasant it is to browse the object tree (well, as pleasant as such an activity can be).

If you look at the `type` attribute of the `pressureObject` object, you can verify that it is a "float64" array. By looking at its `shape` attribute, you can deduce that the array on disk is unidimensional and has 3 elements. See [Section 4.7.1](#) or the internal doc strings for the complete `Array` attribute list.

3.2.4. Reading data from Array objects

Once you have found the desired `Array`, use the `read()` method of the `Array` object to retrieve its data:

```
>>> pressureArray = pressureObject.read()
>>> pressureArray
array([ 25.,  36.,  49.])
>>> print "pressureArray is an object of type:", type(pressureArray)
pressureArray is an object of type: <type 'numpy.ndarray'>
>>> nameArray = h5file.root.columns.name.read()
>>> print "nameArray is an object of type:", type(nameArray)
nameArray is an object of type: <type 'list'>
>>>
>>> print "Data on arrays nameArray and pressureArray:"
Data on arrays nameArray and pressureArray:
>>> for i in range(pressureObject.shape[0]):
    print nameArray[i], "-->", pressureArray[i]

Particle:      5 --> 25.0
Particle:      6 --> 36.0
Particle:      7 --> 49.0
```

You can see that the `read()` method (see [description](#)) returns an authentic NumPy object for the `pressureObject` instance by looking at the output of the `type()` call. A `read()` of the `nameArray` object instance returns a native Python list (of strings). The type of the object saved is stored as an HDF5 attribute (named `FLAVOR`) for objects on disk. This attribute is then read as `Array` meta-information (accessible through in the `Array.attrs.FLAVOR` variable), enabling the read array to be converted into the original object. This provides a means to save a large variety of objects as arrays with the guarantee that you will be able to later recover them in their original form. See [description](#) for a complete list of supported objects for the `Array` object class.

3.3. Committing data to tables and arrays

We have seen how to create tables and arrays and how to browse both data and metadata in the object tree. Let's examine more closely now one of the most powerful capabilities of PyTables, namely, how to modify already created tables and arrays¹.

3.3.1. Appending data to an existing table

Now, let's have a look at how we can add records to an existing table on disk. Let's use our well-known *readout* `Table` object and append some new values to it:

```
>>> table = h5file.root.detector.readout
>>> particle = table.row
```

¹Appending data to arrays is also supported, but you need to create special objects called `EArray` (see [Section 4.9](#) for more info).

```
>>> for i in xrange(10, 15):
    particle['name'] = 'Particle: %6d' % (i)
    particle['TDCcount'] = i % 256
    particle['ADCcount'] = (i * 256) % (1 << 16)
    particle['grid_i'] = i
    particle['grid_j'] = 10 - i
    particle['pressure'] = float(i*i)
    particle['energy'] = float(particle['pressure'] ** 4)
    particle['idnumber'] = i * (2 ** 34)
    particle.append()

>>> table.flush()
```

It's the same method we used to fill a new table. PyTables knows that this table is on disk, and when you add new records, they are appended to the end of the table².

If you look carefully at the code you will see that we have used the `table.row` attribute to create a table row and fill it with the new values. Each time that its `append()` method is called, the actual row is committed to the output buffer and the row pointer is incremented to point to the next table record. When the buffer is full, the data is saved on disk, and the buffer is reused again for the next cycle.

Caveat emptor: Do not forget to always call the `flush()` method after a write operation, or else your tables will not be updated!

Let's have a look at some rows in the modified table and verify that our new data has been appended:

```
>>> for r in table.iterrows():
    print "%-16s | %11.1f | %11.4g | %6d | %6d | %8d |" % \
        (r['name'], r['pressure'], r['energy'], r['grid_i'], r['grid_j'],
         r['TDCcount'])
```

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|----|-------|-----------|----|----|----|
| Particle: | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 |
| Particle: | 1 | 1.0 | 1 | 1 | 9 | 1 |
| Particle: | 2 | 4.0 | 256 | 2 | 8 | 2 |
| Particle: | 3 | 9.0 | 6561 | 3 | 7 | 3 |
| Particle: | 4 | 16.0 | 6.554e+04 | 4 | 6 | 4 |
| Particle: | 5 | 25.0 | 3.906e+05 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| Particle: | 6 | 36.0 | 1.68e+06 | 6 | 4 | 6 |
| Particle: | 7 | 49.0 | 5.765e+06 | 7 | 3 | 7 |
| Particle: | 8 | 64.0 | 1.678e+07 | 8 | 2 | 8 |
| Particle: | 9 | 81.0 | 4.305e+07 | 9 | 1 | 9 |
| Particle: | 10 | 100.0 | 1e+08 | 10 | 0 | 10 |
| Particle: | 11 | 121.0 | 2.144e+08 | 11 | -1 | 11 |
| Particle: | 12 | 144.0 | 4.3e+08 | 12 | -2 | 12 |
| Particle: | 13 | 169.0 | 8.157e+08 | 13 | -3 | 13 |
| Particle: | 14 | 196.0 | 1.476e+09 | 14 | -4 | 14 |

3.3.2. Modifying data in tables

Ok, until now, we've been only reading and writing (appending) values to our tables. But there are times that you need to modify your data once you have saved it on disk (this is specially true when you need to modify the real world data to adapt your goals ;). Let's see how we can modify the values that were saved in our existing tables. We will start modifying single cells in the first row of the `Particle` table:

²Note that you can append not only scalar values to tables, but also fully multidimensional array objects.

```
>>> print "Before modif-->", table[0]
Before modif--> (0, 0, 0.0, 0, 10, 0L, 'Particle:      0', 0.0)
>>> table.cols.TDCcount[0] = 1
>>> print "After modifying first row of ADCcount-->", table[0]
After modifying first row of ADCcount--> (0, 1, 0.0, 0, 10, 0L, 'Particle:
0', 0.0)
>>> table.cols.energy[0] = 2
>>> print "After modifying first row of energy-->", table[0]
After modifying first row of energy--> (0, 1, 2.0, 0, 10, 0L, 'Particle:
0', 0.0)
```

We can modify complete ranges of columns as well:

```
>>> table.cols.TDCcount[2:5] = [2,3,4]
>>> print "After modifying slice [2:5] of TDCcount-->", table[0:5]
After modifying slice [2:5] of TDCcount-->
[(0, 1, 2.0, 0, 10, 0L, 'Particle:      0', 0.0)
 (256, 1, 1.0, 1, 9, 17179869184L, 'Particle:      1', 1.0)
 (512, 2, 256.0, 2, 8, 34359738368L, 'Particle:      2', 4.0)
 (768, 3, 6561.0, 3, 7, 51539607552L, 'Particle:      3', 9.0)
 (1024, 4, 65536.0, 4, 6, 68719476736L, 'Particle:      4', 16.0)]
>>> table.cols.energy[1:9:3] = [2,3,4]
>>> print "After modifying slice [1:9:3] of energy-->", table[0:9]
After modifying slice [1:9:3] of energy-->
[(0, 1, 2.0, 0, 10, 0L, 'Particle:      0', 0.0)
 (256, 1, 2.0, 1, 9, 17179869184L, 'Particle:      1', 1.0)
 (512, 2, 256.0, 2, 8, 34359738368L, 'Particle:      2', 4.0)
 (768, 3, 6561.0, 3, 7, 51539607552L, 'Particle:      3', 9.0)
 (1024, 4, 3.0, 4, 6, 68719476736L, 'Particle:      4', 16.0)
 (1280, 5, 390625.0, 5, 5, 85899345920L, 'Particle:      5', 25.0)
 (1536, 6, 1679616.0, 6, 4, 103079215104L, 'Particle:      6', 36.0)
 (1792, 7, 4.0, 7, 3, 120259084288L, 'Particle:      7', 49.0)
 (2048, 8, 16777216.0, 8, 2, 137438953472L, 'Particle:      8', 64.0)]
```

Check that the values have been correctly modified! *Hint*: remember that column TDCcount is the second one, and that energy is the third. Look for more info on modifying columns in [Section](#).

PyTables also lets you modify complete sets of rows at the same time. As a demonstration of these capability, see the next example:

```
>>> table.modifyRows(start=1, step=3,
                      rows=[(1, 2, 3.0, 4, 5, 6L, 'Particle:  None', 8.0),
                             (2, 4, 6.0, 8, 10, 12L, 'Particle: None*2', 16.0)])
2
>>> print "After modifying the complete third row-->", table[0:5]
After modifying the complete third row-->
[(0, 1, 2.0, 0, 10, 0L, 'Particle:      0', 0.0)
 (1, 2, 3.0, 4, 5, 6L, 'Particle:  None', 8.0)
 (512, 2, 256.0, 2, 8, 34359738368L, 'Particle:      2', 4.0)
 (768, 3, 6561.0, 3, 7, 51539607552L, 'Particle:      3', 9.0)
 (2, 4, 6.0, 8, 10, 12L, 'Particle: None*2', 16.0)]
```

As you can see, the `modifyRows()` call has modified the rows second and fifth, and it returned the number of modified rows.

Apart of `modifyRows()`, there exists another method, called `modifyColumn()` to modify specific columns as well. Please check sections [description](#) and [description](#) for a more in-depth description of them.

Finally, it exists another way of modifying tables that is generally more handy than the described above. This new way uses the method `update()` (see [description](#)) of the `Row` instance that is attached to every table, so it is meant to be used in table iterators. Look at the next example:

```
>>> for row in table.where('TDCcount <= 2'):
    row['energy'] = row['TDCcount']*2
    row.update()

>>> print "After modifying energy column (where TDCcount <=2)-->", table[0:4]
After modifying energy column (where TDCcount <=2)-->
[(0, 1, 2.0, 0, 10, 0L, 'Particle:      0', 0.0)
 (1, 2, 4.0, 4, 5, 6L, 'Particle:   None', 8.0)
 (512, 2, 4.0, 2, 8, 34359738368L, 'Particle:      2', 4.0)
 (768, 3, 6561.0, 3, 7, 51539607552L, 'Particle:      3', 9.0)]
```

Note: The authors find this way of updating tables (i.e. using `Row.update()`) to be both convenient and efficient. Please make sure to use it extensively.

3.3.3. Modifying data in arrays

We are going now to see how to modify data in array objects. The basic way to do this is through the use of `__setitem__` special method (see [description](#)). Let's see at how modify data on the `pressureObject` array:

```
>>> pressureObject = h5file.root.columns.pressure
>>> print "Before modif-->", pressureObject[:]
Before modif--> [ 25.  36.  49.]
>>> pressureObject[0] = 2
>>> print "First modif-->", pressureObject[:]
First modif--> [  2.  36.  49.]
>>> pressureObject[1:3] = [2.1, 3.5]
>>> print "Second modif-->", pressureObject[:]
Second modif--> [  2.   2.1  3.5]
>>> pressureObject[:,2] = [1,2]
>>> print "Third modif-->", pressureObject[:]
Third modif--> [ 1.   2.1  2. ]
```

So, in general, you can use any combination of (multidimensional) extended slicing³ to refer to indexes that you want to modify. See [description](#) for more examples on how to use extended slicing in PyTables objects.

Similarly, with and array of strings:

```
>>> nameObject = h5file.root.columns.name
>>> print "Before modif-->", nameObject[:]
Before modif--> ['Particle:      5', 'Particle:      6', 'Particle:      7']
>>> nameObject[0] = 'Particle:   None'
>>> print "First modif-->", nameObject[:]
First modif--> ['Particle:   None', 'Particle:      6', 'Particle:      7']
>>> nameObject[1:3] = ['Particle:      0', 'Particle:      1']
>>> print "Second modif-->", nameObject[:]
Second modif--> ['Particle:   None', 'Particle:      0', 'Particle:      1']
>>> nameObject[:,2] = ['Particle:     -3', 'Particle:     -5']
```

³With the sole exception that you cannot use negative values for step.

```
>>> print "Third modif-->", nameObject[:]
Third modif--> ['Particle:      -3', 'Particle:      0', 'Particle:      -5']
```

3.3.4. And finally... how to delete rows from a table

We'll finish this tutorial by deleting some rows from the table we have. Suppose that we want to delete the the 5th to 9th rows (inclusive):

```
>>> table.removeRows(5,10)
5L
```

`removeRows(start, stop)` (see [description](#)) deletes the rows in the range (start, stop). It returns the number of rows effectively removed.

We have reached the end of this first tutorial. Don't forget to close the file when you finish:

```
>>> h5file.close()
>>> ^D
$
```

In [Figure 3.2](#) you can see a graphical view of the PyTables file with the datasets we have just created. In [Figure 3.3](#) are displayed the general properties of the table `/detector/readout`.

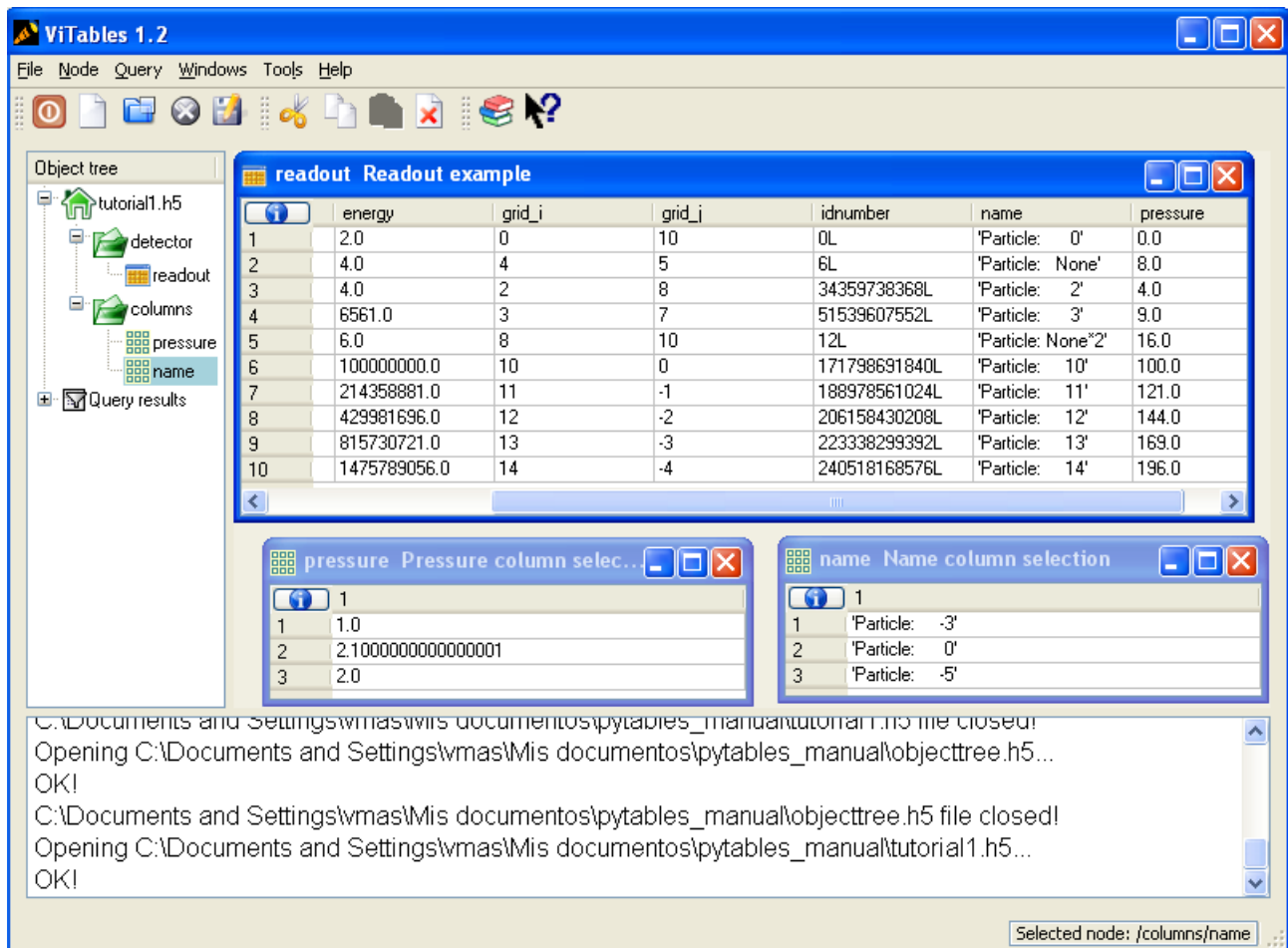


Figure 3.2. The final version of the data file for tutorial 1.

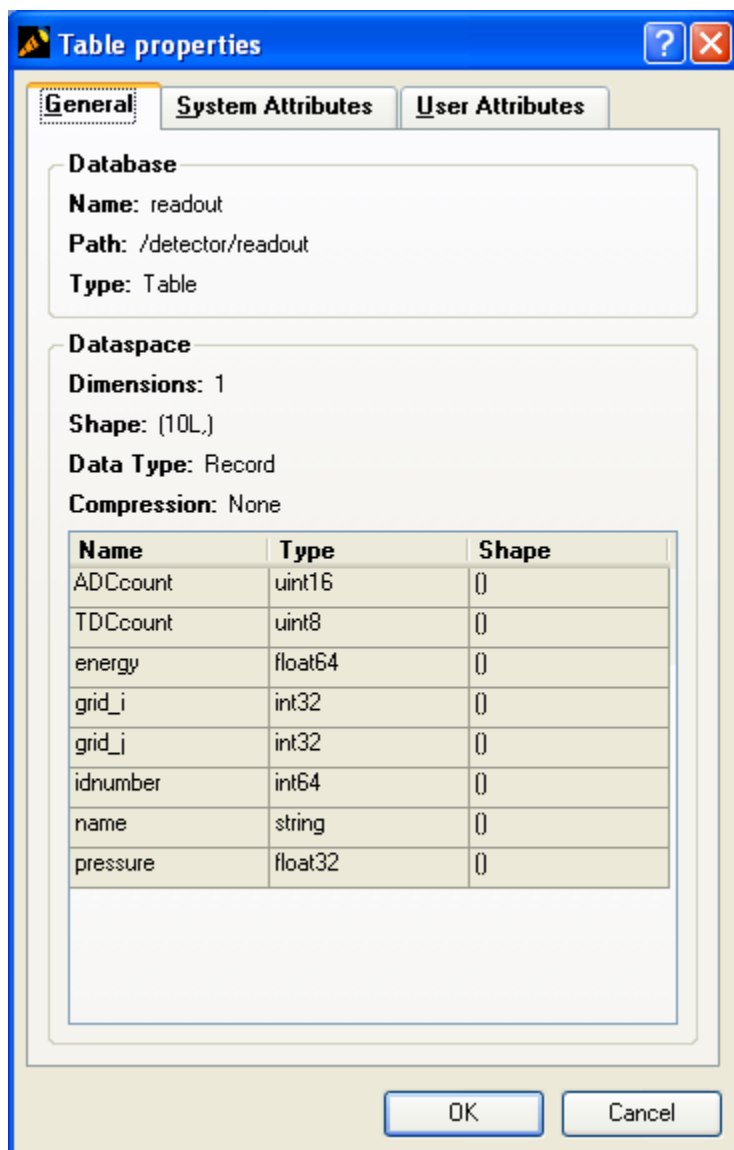


Figure 3.3. General properties of the `/detector/readout` table.

3.4. Multidimensional table cells and automatic sanity checks

Now it's time for a more real-life example (i.e. with errors in the code). We will create two groups that branch directly from the `root` node, `Particles` and `Events`. Then, we will put three tables in each group. In `Particles` we will put tables based on the `Particle` descriptor and in `Events`, the tables based the `Event` descriptor.

Afterwards, we will provision the tables with a number of records. Finally, we will read the newly-created table `Events/TEvent3` and select some values from it, using a comprehension list.

Look at the next script (you can find it in `examples/tutorial2.py`). It appears to do all of the above, but it contains some small bugs. Note that this `Particle` class is not directly related to the one defined in last tutorial; this class is simpler (note, however, the *multidimensional* columns called `pressure` and `temperature`).

We also introduce a new manner to describe a Table as a dictionary, as you can see in the Event description. See [description](#) about the different kinds of descriptor objects that can be passed to the `createTable()` method.

```
from tables import *
from numpy import *

# Describe a particle record
class Particle(IsDescription):
    name          = StringCol(itemsize=16)  # 16-character string
    lati          = Int32Col()              # integer
    longi         = Int32Col()              # integer
    pressure      = Float32Col(shape=(2,3)) # array of floats (single-precision)
    temperature   = Float64Col(shape=(2,3)) # array of doubles (double-
precision)

# Another way to describe the columns of a table
Event = {
    "name"       : StringCol(itemsize=16),
    "TDCcount"   : UInt8Col(),
    "ADCcount"   : UInt16Col(),
    "xcoord"     : Float32Col(),
    "ycoord"     : Float32Col(),
}

# Open a file in "w"rite mode
fileh = openFile("tutorial2.h5", mode = "w")
# Get the HDF5 root group
root = fileh.root
# Create the groups:
for groupname in ("Particles", "Events"):
    group = fileh.createGroup(root, groupname)
# Now, create and fill the tables in Particles group
gparticles = root.Particles
# Create 3 new tables
for tablename in ("TParticle1", "TParticle2", "TParticle3"):
    # Create a table
    table = fileh.createTable("/Particles", tablename, Particle,
                             "Particles: "+tablename)
    # Get the record object associated with the table:
    particle = table.row
    # Fill the table with 257 particles
    for i in xrange(257):
        # First, assign the values to the Particle record
        particle['name'] = 'Particle: %6d' % (i)
        particle['lati'] = i
        particle['longi'] = 10 - i
        ##### Detectable errors start here. Play with them!
        particle['pressure'] = array(i*arange(2*3)).reshape((2,4))  #
Incorrect
        #particle['pressure'] = array(i*arange(2*3)).reshape((2,3))  # Correct
        ##### End of errors
        particle['temperature'] = (i**2)          # Broadcasting
        # This injects the Record values
        particle.append()
```

```

# Flush the table buffers
table.flush()

# Now, go for Events:
for tablename in ("TEvent1", "TEvent2", "TEvent3"):
    # Create a table in Events group
    table = fileh.createTable(root.Events, tablename, Event,
                              "Events: "+tablename)
    # Get the record object associated with the table:
    event = table.row
    # Fill the table with 257 events
    for i in xrange(257):
        # First, assign the values to the Event record
        event['name'] = 'Event: %6d' % (i)
        event['TDCcount'] = i % (1<8)    # Correct range
        ##### Detectable errors start here. Play with them!
        event['xcoor'] = float(i**2)     # Wrong spelling
        #event['xcoord'] = float(i**2)   # Correct spelling
        event['ADCcount'] = "sss"        # Wrong type
        #event['ADCcount'] = i * 2       # Correct type
        ##### End of errors
        event['ycoord'] = float(i)**4
        # This injects the Record values
        event.append()
    # Flush the buffers
    table.flush()

# Read the records from table "/Events/TEvent3" and select some
table = root.Events.TEvent3
e = [ p['TDCcount'] for p in table
      if p['ADCcount'] < 20 and 4 <= p['TDCcount'] < 15 ]
print "Last record ==>", p
print "Selected values ==>", e
print "Total selected records ==> ", len(e)
# Finally, close the file (this also will flush all the remaining buffers!)
fileh.close()

```

3.4.1. Shape checking

If you look at the code carefully, you'll see that it won't work. You will get the following error:

```

$ python tutorial2.py
Traceback (most recent call last):
  File "tutorial2.py", line 51, in ?
    particle['pressure'] = array(i*arange(2*3), shape=(2,4)) # Incorrect
  File ".../numpy/numarraycore.py", line 400, in array
    a.setshape(shape)
  File ".../numpy/generic.py", line 702, in setshape
    raise ValueError("New shape is not consistent with the old shape")
ValueError: New shape is not consistent with the old shape

```

This error indicates that you are trying to assign an array with an incompatible shape to a table cell. Looking at the source, we see that we were trying to assign an array of shape (2,4) to a pressure element, which was defined with the shape (2,3).

In general, these kinds of operations are forbidden, with one valid exception: when you assign a *scalar* value to a multidimensional column cell, all the cell elements are populated with the value of the scalar. For example:

```
particle['temperature'] = (i**2)      # Broadcasting
```

The value `i**2` is assigned to all the elements of the `temperature` table cell. This capability is provided by the NumPy package and is known as *broadcasting*.

3.4.2. Field name checking

After fixing the previous error and rerunning the program, we encounter another error:

```
$ python tutorial2.py
Traceback (most recent call last):
  File "tutorial2.py", line 73, in ?
    event['xcoor'] = float(i**2)      # Wrong spelling
  File "tableExtension.pyx", line 1094, in tableExtension.Row.__setitem__
  File "tableExtension.pyx", line 127, in tableExtension.getNestedFieldCache
  File "utilsExtension.pyx", line 331, in utilsExtension.getNestedField
KeyError: 'no such column: xcoor'
```

This error indicates that we are attempting to assign a value to a non-existent field in the *event* table object. By looking carefully at the *Event* class attributes, we see that we misspelled the *xcoord* field (we wrote *xcoor* instead). This is unusual behavior for Python, as normally when you assign a value to a non-existent instance variable, Python creates a new variable with that name. Such a feature can be dangerous when dealing with an object that contains a fixed list of field names. PyTables checks that the field exists and raises a *KeyError* if the check fails.

3.4.3. Data type checking

Finally, the last issue which we will find here is a *TypeError* exception:

```
$ python tutorial2.py
Traceback (most recent call last):
  File "tutorial2.py", line 75, in ?
    event['ADCCount'] = "sss"        # Wrong type
  File "tableExtension.pyx", line 1111, in tableExtension.Row.__setitem__
TypeError: invalid type (<type 'str'>) for column ``ADCCount``
```

And, if we change the affected line to read:

```
event.ADCCount = i * 2              # Correct type
```

we will see that the script ends well.

You can see the structure created with this (corrected) script in [Figure 3.4](#). In particular, note the multidimensional column cells in `table /Particles/TParticle2`.

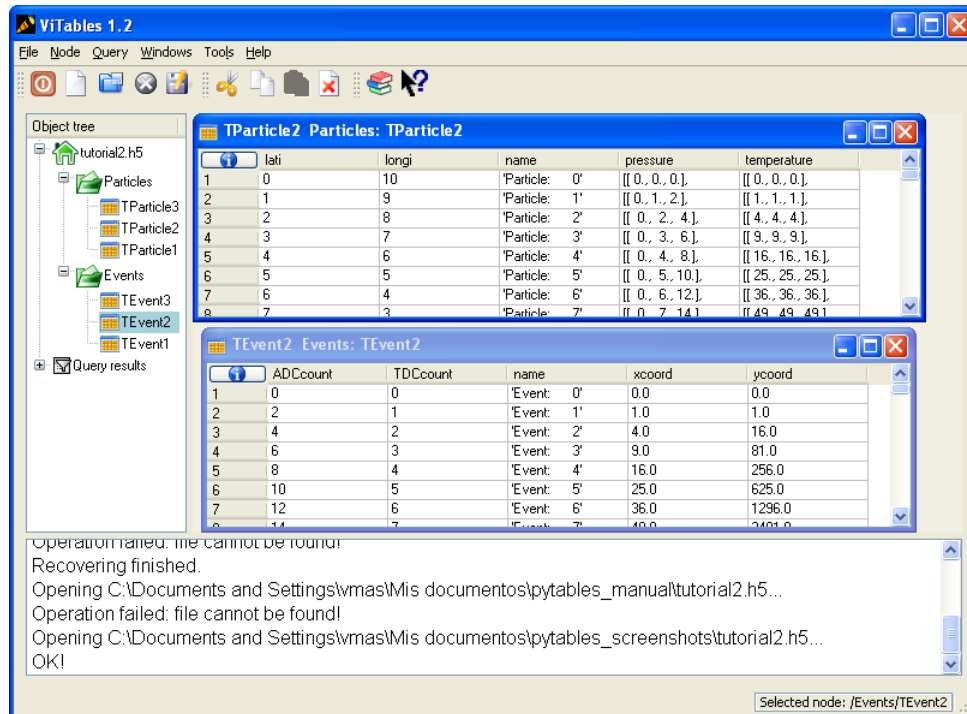


Figure 3.4. Table hierarchy for tutorial 2.

3.5. Exercising the Undo/Redo feature

PyTables has integrated support for undoing and/or redoing actions. This functionality lets you put marks in specific places of your hierarchy manipulation operations, so that you can make your HDF5 file pop back (*undo*) to a specific mark (for example for inspecting how your hierarchy looked at that point). You can also go forward to a more recent marker (*redo*). You can even do jumps to the marker you want using just one instruction as we will see shortly.

You can undo/redo all the operations that are related to object tree management, like creating, deleting, moving or renaming nodes (or complete sub-hierarchies) inside a given object tree. You can also undo/redo operations (i.e. creation, deletion or modification) of persistent node attributes. However, when actions include *internal* modifications of datasets (that includes `Table.append`, `Table.modifyRows` or `Table.removeRows` among others), they cannot be undone/redone currently.

This capability can be useful in many situations, like for example when doing simulations with multiple branches. When you have to choose a path to follow in such a situation, you can put a mark there and, if the simulation is not going well, you can go back to that mark and start another path. Other possible application is defining coarse-grained operations which operate in a transactional-like way, i.e. which return the database to its previous state if the operation finds some kind of problem while running. You can probably devise many other scenarios where the Undo/Redo feature can be useful to you ⁴.

3.5.1. A basic example

In this section, we are going to show the basic behavior of the Undo/Redo feature. You can find the code used in this example in `examples/tutorial3-1.py`. A somewhat more complex example will be explained in the next section.

First, let's create a file:

⁴You can even *hide* nodes temporarily. Will you be able to find out how?

```
>>> import tables
>>> fileh = tables.openFile("tutorial3-1.h5", "w", title="Undo/Redo demo 1")
```

And now, activate the Undo/Redo feature with the method `enableUndo` (see [description](#)) of `File`:

```
>>> fileh.enableUndo()
```

From now on, all our actions will be logged internally by PyTables. Now, we are going to create a node (in this case an `Array` object):

```
>>> one = fileh.createArray('/', 'anarray', [3,4], "An array")
```

Now, mark this point:

```
>>> fileh.mark()
1
```

We have marked the current point in the sequence of actions. In addition, the `mark()` method has returned the identifier assigned to this new mark, that is 1 (mark #0 is reserved for the implicit mark at the beginning of the action log). In the next section we will see that you can also assign a *name* to a mark (see [description](#) for more info on `mark()`). Now, we are going to create another array:

```
>>> another = fileh.createArray('/', 'anotherarray', [4,5], "Another array")
```

Right. Now, we can start doing funny things. Let's say that we want to pop back to the previous mark (that whose value was 1, do you remember?). Let's introduce the `undo()` method (see [description](#)):

```
>>> fileh.undo()
```

Fine, what do you think it happened? Well, let's have a look at the object tree:

```
>>> print fileh
tutorial3-1.h5 (File) 'Undo/Redo demo 1'
Last modif.: 'Tue Mar 13 11:43:55 2007'
Object Tree:
/ (RootGroup) 'Undo/Redo demo 1'
/anarray (Array(2,)) 'An array'
```

What happened with the `/anotherarray` node we've just created? You guess it, it has disappeared because it was created *after* the mark 1. If you are curious enough you may well ask where it has gone. Well, it has not been deleted completely; it has been just moved into a special, hidden, group of PyTables that renders it invisible and waiting for a chance to be reborn.

Now, unwind once more, and look at the object tree:

```
>>> fileh.undo()
>>> print fileh
tutorial3-1.h5 (File) 'Undo/Redo demo 1'
Last modif.: 'Tue Mar 13 11:43:55 2007'
Object Tree:
/ (RootGroup) 'Undo/Redo demo 1'
```

Oops, `/anarray` has disappeared as well!. Don't worry, it will revisit us very shortly. So, you might be somewhat lost right now; in which mark are we?. Let's ask the `getCurrentMark()` method (see [description](#)) in the file handler:

```
>>> print fileh.getCurrentMark()
0
```

So we are at mark #0, remember? Mark #0 is an implicit mark that is created when you start the log of actions when calling `File.enableUndo()`. Fine, but you are missing your too-young-to-die arrays. What can we do about that? `File.redo()` (see [description](#)) to the rescue:

```
>>> fileh.redo()
>>> print fileh
tutorial3-1.h5 (File) 'Undo/Redo demo 1'
Last modif.: 'Tue Mar 13 11:43:55 2007'
Object Tree:
/ (RootGroup) 'Undo/Redo demo 1'
/anarray (Array(2,)) 'An array'
```

Great! The `/anarray` array has come into life again. Just check that it is alive and well:

```
>>> fileh.root.anarray.read()
[3, 4]
>>> fileh.root.anarray.title
'An array'
```

Well, it looks pretty similar than in its previous life; what's more, it is exactly the same object!:

```
>>> fileh.root.anarray is one
True
```

It just was moved to the the hidden group and back again, but that's all! That's kind of fun, so we are going to do the same with `/anotherarray`:

```
>>> fileh.redo()
>>> print fileh
tutorial3-1.h5 (File) 'Undo/Redo demo 1'
Last modif.: 'Tue Mar 13 11:43:55 2007'
Object Tree:
/ (RootGroup) 'Undo/Redo demo 1'
/anarray (Array(2,)) 'An array'
/anotherarray (Array(2,)) 'Another array'
```

Welcome back, `/anotherarray`! Just a couple of sanity checks:

```
>>> assert fileh.root.anotherarray.read() == [4,5]
>>> assert fileh.root.anotherarray.title == "Another array"
>>> fileh.root.anotherarray is another
True
```

Nice, you managed to turn your data back into life. Congratulations! But wait, do not forget to close your action log when you don't need this feature anymore:

```
>>> fileh.disableUndo()
```

That will allow you to continue working with your data without actually requiring PyTables to keep track of all your actions, and more importantly, allowing your objects to die completely if they have to, not requiring to keep them anywhere, and hence saving process time and space in your database file.

3.5.2. A more complete example

Now, time for a somewhat more sophisticated demonstration of the Undo/Redo feature. In it, several marks will be set in different parts of the code flow and we will see how to jump between these marks with just one method call. You can find the code used in this example in `examples/tutorial3-2.py`

Let's introduce the first part of the code:

```
import tables

# Create an HDF5 file
fileh = tables.openFile('tutorial3-2.h5', 'w', title='Undo/Redo demo 2')

    #'-***-***-***-***-***- enable undo/redo log  -***-***-***-***-***-'
fileh.enableUndo()

# Start undoable operations
fileh.createArray('/', 'otherarray1', [3,4], 'Another array 1')
fileh.createGroup('/', 'agroup', 'Group 1')
# Create a 'first' mark
fileh.mark('first')
fileh.createArray('/agroup', 'otherarray2', [4,5], 'Another array 2')
fileh.createGroup('/agroup', 'agroup2', 'Group 2')
# Create a 'second' mark
fileh.mark('second')
fileh.createArray('/agroup/agroup2', 'otherarray3', [5,6], 'Another array 3')
# Create a 'third' mark
fileh.mark('third')
fileh.createArray('/', 'otherarray4', [6,7], 'Another array 4')
fileh.createArray('/agroup', 'otherarray5', [7,8], 'Another array 5')
```

You can see how we have set several marks interspersed in the code flow, representing different states of the database. Also, note that we have assigned *names* to these marks, namely 'first', 'second' and 'third'.

Now, start doing some jumps back and forth in the states of the database:

```
# Now go to mark 'first'
fileh.goto('first')
assert '/otherarray1' in fileh
assert '/agroup' in fileh
assert '/agroup/agroup2' not in fileh
assert '/agroup/otherarray2' not in fileh
assert '/agroup/agroup2/otherarray3' not in fileh
assert '/otherarray4' not in fileh
assert '/agroup/otherarray5' not in fileh
# Go to mark 'third'
fileh.goto('third')
assert '/otherarray1' in fileh
assert '/agroup' in fileh
assert '/agroup/agroup2' in fileh
assert '/agroup/otherarray2' in fileh
assert '/agroup/agroup2/otherarray3' in fileh
assert '/otherarray4' not in fileh
assert '/agroup/otherarray5' not in fileh
# Now go to mark 'second'
fileh.goto('second')
assert '/otherarray1' in fileh
assert '/agroup' in fileh
assert '/agroup/agroup2' in fileh
assert '/agroup/otherarray2' in fileh
assert '/agroup/agroup2/otherarray3' not in fileh
```



```
assert '/otherarray4' not in fileh
assert '/agroup/otherarray5' not in fileh
```

Well, the code above shows how easy is to jump to a certain mark in the database by using the `goto()` method (see [description](#)).

There are also a couple of implicit marks for going to the beginning or the end of the saved states: 0 and -1. Going to mark #0 means go to the beginning of the saved actions, that is, when method `fileh.enableUndo()` was called. Going to mark #-1 means go to the last recorded action, that is the last action in the code flow.

Let's see what happens when going to the end of the action log:

```
# Go to the end
fileh.goto(-1)
assert '/otherarray1' in fileh
assert '/agroup' in fileh
assert '/agroup/agroup2' in fileh
assert '/agroup/otherarray2' in fileh
assert '/agroup/agroup2/otherarray3' in fileh
assert '/otherarray4' in fileh
assert '/agroup/otherarray5' in fileh
# Check that objects have come back to life in a sane state
assert fileh.root.otherarray1.read() == [3,4]
assert fileh.root.agroup.otherarray2.read() == [4,5]
assert fileh.root.agroup.agroup2.otherarray3.read() == [5,6]
assert fileh.root.otherarray4.read() == [6,7]
assert fileh.root.agroup.otherarray5.read() == [7,8]
```

Try yourself going to the beginning of the action log (remember, the mark #0) and check the contents of the object tree.

We have nearly finished this demonstration. As always, do not forget to close the action log as well as the database:

```
##'----- disable undo/redo log -----'
fileh.disableUndo()

# Close the file
fileh.close()
```

You might want to check other examples on Undo/Redo feature that appear in `examples/undo-redo.py`.

3.6. Using enumerated types

PyTables includes support for handling enumerated types. Those types are defined by providing an exhaustive *set* or *list* of possible, named values for a variable of that type. Enumerated variables of the same type are usually compared between them for equality and sometimes for order, but are not usually operated upon.

Enumerated values have an associated *name* and *concrete value*. Every name is unique and so are concrete values. An enumerated variable always takes the concrete value, not its name. Usually, the concrete value is not used directly, and frequently it is entirely irrelevant. For the same reason, an enumerated variable is not usually compared with concrete values out of its enumerated type. For that kind of use, standard variables and constants are more adequate.

PyTables provides the Enum (see [Section 4.14.3](#)) class to provide support for enumerated types. Each instance of Enum is an enumerated type (or *enumeration*). For example, let us create an enumeration of colors⁵:

⁵All these examples can be found in `examples/enum.py`.

```
>>> import tables
>>> colorList = ['red', 'green', 'blue', 'white', 'black']
>>> colors = tables.Enum(colorList)
```

Here we used a simple list giving the names of enumerated values, but we left the choice of concrete values up to the Enum class. Let us see the enumerated pairs to check those values:

```
>>> print "Colors:", [v for v in colors]
Colors: [('blue', 2), ('black', 4), ('white', 3), ('green', 1), ('red', 0)]
```

Names have been given automatic integer concrete values. We can iterate over the values in an enumeration, but we will usually be more interested in accessing single values. We can get the concrete value associated with a name by accessing it as an attribute or as an item (the later can be useful for names not resembling Python identifiers):

```
>>> print "Value of 'red' and 'white':", (colors.red, colors.white)
Value of 'red' and 'white': (0, 3)
>>> print "Value of 'yellow':", colors.yellow
Value of 'yellow':
Traceback (most recent call last):
  File "<stdin>", line 1, in ?
  File ".../tables/misc/enum.py", line 230, in __getattr__
    raise AttributeError(*ke.args)
AttributeError: no enumerated value with that name: 'yellow'
>>>
>>> print "Value of 'red' and 'white':", (colors['red'], colors['white'])
Value of 'red' and 'white': (0, 3)
>>> print "Value of 'yellow':", colors['yellow']
Value of 'yellow':
Traceback (most recent call last):
  File "<stdin>", line 1, in ?
  File ".../tables/misc/enum.py", line 189, in __getitem__
    raise KeyError("no enumerated value with that name: %r" % (name,))
KeyError: "no enumerated value with that name: 'yellow'"
```

See how accessing a value that is not in the enumeration raises the appropriate exception. We can also do the opposite action and get the name that matches a concrete value by using the `__call__()` method of Enum:

```
>>> print "Name of value %s:" % colors.red, colors(colors.red)
Name of value 0: red
>>> print "Name of value 1234:", colors(1234)
Name of value 1234:
Traceback (most recent call last):
  File "<stdin>", line 1, in ?
  File ".../tables/misc/enum.py", line 320, in __call__
    raise ValueError(
ValueError: no enumerated value with that concrete value: 1234
```

You can see what we made as using the enumerated type to *convert* a concrete value into a name in the enumeration. Of course, values out of the enumeration can not be converted.

3.6.1. Enumerated columns

Columns of an enumerated type can be declared by using the EnumCol (see [Section 4.13.2](#)) class. To see how this works, let us open a new PyTables file and create a table to collect the simulated results of a probabilistic experiment. In it, we have a bag full of colored balls; we take a ball out and annotate the time of extraction and the color of the ball.

```
>>> h5f = tables.openFile('enum.h5', 'w')
>>> class BallExt(tables.IsDescription):
    ballTime = tables.Time32Col()
    ballColor = tables.EnumCol(colors, 'black', base='uint8')

>>> tbl = h5f.createTable(
    '/', 'extractions', BallExt, title="Random ball extractions")
>>>
```

We declared the `ballColor` column to be of the enumerated type `colors`, with a default value of `black`. We also stated that we are going to store concrete values as unsigned 8-bit integer values⁶.

Let us use some random values to fill the table:

```
>>> import time
>>> import random
>>> now = time.time()
>>> row = tbl.row
>>> for i in range(10):
    row['ballTime'] = now + i
    row['ballColor'] = colors[random.choice(colorList)] # notice this
    row.append()
>>>
```

Notice how we used the `__getitem__()` call of `colors` to get the concrete value to store in `ballColor`. You should know that this way of appending values to a table does automatically check for the validity on enumerated values. For instance:

```
>>> row['ballTime'] = now + 42
>>> row['ballColor'] = 1234
Traceback (most recent call last):
  File "<stdin>", line 1, in <module>
  File "tableExtension.pyx", line 1086, in tableExtension.Row.__setitem__
  File ".../tables/misc/enum.py", line 320, in __call__
    "no enumerated value with that concrete value: %r" % (value,))
ValueError: no enumerated value with that concrete value: 1234
```

But take care that this check is *only* performed here and not in other methods such as `tbl.append()` or `tbl.modifyRows()`. Now, after flushing the table we can see the results of the insertions:

```
>>> tbl.flush()
>>> for r in tbl:
    ballTime = r['ballTime']
    ballColor = colors(r['ballColor']) # notice this
    print "Ball extracted on %d is of color %s." % (ballTime, ballColor)

Ball extracted on 1173785568 is of color green.
Ball extracted on 1173785569 is of color black.
Ball extracted on 1173785570 is of color white.
Ball extracted on 1173785571 is of color black.
Ball extracted on 1173785572 is of color black.
Ball extracted on 1173785573 is of color red.
Ball extracted on 1173785574 is of color green.
```

⁶In fact, only integer values are supported right now, but this may change in the future.

```
Ball extracted on 1173785575 is of color red.
Ball extracted on 1173785576 is of color white.
Ball extracted on 1173785577 is of color white.
```

As a last note, you may be wondering how to have access to the enumeration associated with `ballColor` once the file is closed and reopened. You can call `tbl.getEnum('ballColor')` (see [the section called “getEnum\(colname\)”](#)) to get the enumeration back.

3.6.2. Enumerated arrays

`EArray` and `VArray` leaves can also be declared to store enumerated values by means of the `EnumAtom` (see [Section 4.13.3](#)) class, which works very much like `EnumCol` for tables. Also, `Array` leaves can be used to open native HDF enumerated arrays.

Let us create a sample `EArray` containing ranges of working days as bidimensional values:

```
>>> workingDays = {'Mon': 1, 'Tue': 2, 'Wed': 3, 'Thu': 4, 'Fri': 5}
>>> dayRange = tables.EnumAtom(workingDays, 'Mon', base='uint16')
>>> earr = h5f.createEArray('/', 'days', dayRange, (0, 2), title="Working day
    ranges")
>>> earr.flavor = 'python'
```

Nothing surprising, except for a pair of details. In the first place, we use a *dictionary* instead of a list to explicitly set concrete values in the enumeration. In the second place, there is no explicit `Enum` instance created! Instead, the dictionary is passed as the first argument to the constructor of `EnumAtom`. If the constructor gets a list or a dictionary instead of an enumeration, it automatically builds the enumeration from it.

Now let us feed some data to the array:

```
>>> wdays = earr.getEnum()
>>> earr.append([(wdays.Mon, wdays.Fri), (wdays.Wed, wdays.Fri)])
>>> earr.append([(wdays.Mon, 1234)])
```

Please note that, since we had no explicit `Enum` instance, we were forced to use `getEnum()` (see [Section 4.9.1](#)) to get it from the array (we could also have used `dayRange.enum`). Also note that we were able to append an invalid value (1234). Array methods do not check the validity of enumerated values.

Finally, we will print the contents of the array:

```
>>> for (d1, d2) in earr:
    print "From %s to %s (%d days)." % (wdays(d1), wdays(d2), d2-d1+1)
```

```
From Mon to Fri (5 days).
```

```
From Wed to Fri (3 days).
```

```
Traceback (most recent call last):
```

```
  File "<stdin>", line 2, in <module>
```

```
  File ".../tables/misc/enum.py", line 320, in __call__
```

```
    "no enumerated value with that concrete value: %r" % (value,))
```

```
ValueError: no enumerated value with that concrete value: 1234
```

That was an example of operating on concrete values. It also showed how the value-to-name conversion failed because of the value not belonging to the enumeration.

Now we will close the file, and this little tutorial on enumerated types is done:

```
>>> h5f.close()
```

3.7. Dealing with nested structures in tables

PyTables supports the handling of nested structures (or nested datatypes, as you prefer) in table objects, allowing you to define arbitrarily nested columns.

An example will clarify what this means. Let's suppose that you want to group your data in pieces of information that are more related than others pieces in your table, So you may want to tie them up together in order to have your table better structured but also be able to retrieve and deal with these groups more easily.

You can create such a nested substructures by just nesting subclasses of `IsDescription`. Let's see one example (okay, it's a bit silly, but will serve for demonstration purposes):

```
from tables import *

class Info(IsDescription):
    """A sub-structure of Test"""
    _v_pos = 2    # The position in the whole structure
    name = StringCol(10)
    value = Float64Col(pos=0)

colors = Enum(['red', 'green', 'blue'])

class NestedDescr(IsDescription):
    """A description that has several nested columns"""
    color = EnumCol(colors, 'red', base='uint32')
    info1 = Info()
    class info2(IsDescription):
        _v_pos = 1
        name = StringCol(10)
        value = Float64Col(pos=0)
        class info3(IsDescription):
            x = Float64Col(dflt=1)
            y = UInt8Col(dflt=1)
```

The root class is `NestedDescr` and both `info1` and `info2` are *substructures* of it. Note how `info1` is actually an instance of the class `Info` that was defined prior to `NestedDescr`. Also, there is a third substructure, namely `info3` that hangs from the substructure `info2`. You can also define positions of substructures in the containing object by declaring the special class attribute `_v_pos`.

3.7.1. Nested table creation

Now that we have defined our nested structure, let's create a *nested* table, that is a table with columns that contain other subcolumns.

```
>>> fileh = openFile("nested-tut.h5", "w")
>>> table = fileh.createTable(fileh.root, 'table', NestedDescr)
```

Done! Now, we have to feed the table with some values. The problem is how we are going to reference to the nested fields. That's easy, just use a `'/'` character to separate names in different nested levels. Look at this:

```
>>> row = table.row
>>> for i in range(10):
    row['color'] = colors[['red', 'green', 'blue'][i%3]]
    row['info1/name'] = "name1-%s" % i
```

```

    row['info2/name'] = "name2-%s" % i
    row['info2/info3/y'] = i
    # All the rest will be filled with defaults
    row.append()

>>> table.flush()
>>> table.nrows
10L

```

You see? In order to fill the fields located in the substructures, we just need to specify its full path in the table hierarchy.

3.7.2. Reading nested tables

Now, what happens if we want to read the table? What kind of data container will we get? Well, it's worth trying it:

```

>>> nra = table[:,4]
>>> nra
array([(((1.0, 0), 'name2-0', 0.0), ('name1-0', 0.0), 0L),
       (((1.0, 4), 'name2-4', 0.0), ('name1-4', 0.0), 1L),
       (((1.0, 8), 'name2-8', 0.0), ('name1-8', 0.0), 2L)],
      dtype=[('info2', [('info3', [('x', '>f8'), ('y', '|u1')]),
                    ('name', '|S10'), ('value', '>f8')]),
             ('info1', [('name', '|S10'), ('value', '>f8')]),
             ('color', '>u4')])

```

What we got is a NumPy array with a *compound, nested datatype* (its `dtype` is a list of name-datatype tuples). We read one row for each four in the table, giving a result of three rows.



Note

When using the `numarray` flavor, you will get an instance of the `NestedRecArray` class that lives in the `tables.nra` package. `NestedRecArray` is actually a subclass of the `RecArray` object of the `numarray.records` module. You can get more info about `NestedRecArray` object in [Appendix C](#).

You can make use of the above object in many different ways. For example, you can use it to append new data to the existing table object:

```

>>> table.append(nra)
>>> table.nrows
13L

```

Or, to create new tables:

```

>>> table2 = fileh.createTable(fileh.root, 'table2', nra)
>>> table2[:]
array([(((1.0, 0), 'name2-0', 0.0), ('name1-0', 0.0), 0L),
       (((1.0, 4), 'name2-4', 0.0), ('name1-4', 0.0), 1L),
       (((1.0, 8), 'name2-8', 0.0), ('name1-8', 0.0), 2L)],
      dtype=[('info2', [('info3', [('x', '<f8'), ('y', '|u1')]),
                    ('name', '|S10'), ('value', '<f8')]),
             ('info1', [('name', '|S10'), ('value', '<f8')]),
             ('color', '<u4')])

```

Finally, we can select nested values that fulfill some condition:

```
>>> names = [ x['info2/name'] for x in table if x['color'] == colors.red ]
>>> names
['name2-0', 'name2-3', 'name2-6', 'name2-9', 'name2-0']
```

Note that the row accessor does not provide the natural naming feature, so you have to completely specify the path of your desired columns in order to reach them.

3.7.3. Using Cols accessor

We can use the `cols` attribute object (see [Section 4.6.8](#)) of the table so as to quickly access the info located in the interesting substructures:

```
>>> table.cols.info2[1:5]
array([(1.0, 1), 'name2-1', 0.0), ((1.0, 2), 'name2-2', 0.0),
      ((1.0, 3), 'name2-3', 0.0), ((1.0, 4), 'name2-4', 0.0)],
      dtype=[('info3', [(('x', '<f8'), ('y', '|u1')]), ('name', '|S10'),
                      ('value', '<f8')])])
```

Here, we have made use of the `cols` accessor to access to the *info2* substructure and an slice operation to get access to the subset of data we were interested in; you probably have recognized the natural naming approach here. We can continue and ask for data in *info3* substructure:

```
>>> table.cols.info2.info3[1:5]
array([(1.0, 1), (1.0, 2), (1.0, 3), (1.0, 4)],
      dtype=[('x', '<f8'), ('y', '|u1')])
```

You can also use the `_f_col` method to get a handler for a column:

```
>>> table.cols._f_col('info2')
/table.cols.info2 (Cols), 3 columns
  info3 (Cols(), Description)
    name (Column(), |S10)
    value (Column(), float64)
```

Here, you've got another `Cols` object handler because *info2* was a nested column. If you select a non-nested column, you will get a regular `Column` instance:

```
>>> table.cols._f_col('info2/info3/y')
/table.cols.info2.info3.y (Column(), uint8, idx=None)
```

To sum up, the `cols` accessor is a very handy and powerful way to access data in your nested tables. Don't be afraid of using it, specially when doing interactive work.

3.7.4. Accessing meta-information of nested tables

Tables have an attribute called `description` which points to an instance of the `Description` class (see [Section 4.6.6](#)) and is useful to discover different meta-information about table data.

Let's see how it looks like:

```
>>> table.description
{
  "info2": {
    "info3": {
      "x": Float64Col(shape=(), dflt=1.0, pos=0),
```

```

    "y": UInt8Col(shape=(), dflt=1, pos=1)},
    "name": StringCol(itemsizes=10, shape=(), dflt='', pos=1),
    "value": Float64Col(shape=(), dflt=0.0, pos=2)},
    "info1": {
        "name": StringCol(itemsizes=10, shape=(), dflt='', pos=0),
        "value": Float64Col(shape=(), dflt=0.0, pos=1)},
    "color": EnumCol(enum=Enum({'blue': 2, 'green': 1, 'red': 0}), dflt='red',
        base=UInt32Atom(shape=(), dflt=0), shape=(), pos=2)}

```

As you can see, it provides very useful information on both the formats and the structure of the columns in your table.

This object also provides a natural naming approach to access to subcolumns metadata:

```

>>> table.description.info1
{
    "name": StringCol(itemsizes=10, shape=(), dflt='', pos=0),
    "value": Float64Col(shape=(), dflt=0.0, pos=1)}
>>> table.description.info2.info3
{
    "x": Float64Col(shape=(), dflt=1.0, pos=0),
    "y": UInt8Col(shape=(), dflt=1, pos=1)}

```

There are other variables that can be interesting for you:

```

>>> table.description._v_nestedNames
[('info2', [('info3', ['x', 'y']), 'name', 'value']),
 ('info1', ['name', 'value']), 'color']
>>> table.description.info1._v_nestedNames
['name', 'value']

```

`_v_nestedNames` provides the names of the columns as well as its structure. You can see that there are the same attributes for the different levels of the `Description` object, because the levels are *also* `Description` objects themselves.

There is a special attribute, called `_v_nestedDescr`, that can be useful to create nested record arrays that imitate the structure of the table (or a subtable thereof):

```

>>> import numpy
>>> table.description._v_nestedDescr
[('info2', [('info3', [('x', '(>f8)'), ('y', '(>u1')]), ('name', '(>S10)'),
 ('value', '(>f8')]), ('info1', [('name', '(>S10)'), ('value', '(>f8')]),
 ('color', '(>u4')])
>>> numpy.rec.array(None, shape=0,
                    dtype=table.description._v_nestedDescr)
recarray([],
          dtype=[('info2', [('info3', [('x', '>f8'), ('y', '|u1')]),
 ('name', '|S10'), ('value', '>f8')]),
 ('info1', [('name', '|S10'), ('value', '>f8')]),
 ('color', '>u4')])
>>> numpy.rec.array(None, shape=0,
                    dtype=table.description.info2._v_nestedDescr)
recarray([],
          dtype=[('info3', [('x', '>f8'), ('y', '|u1')]), ('name', '|S10'),
 ('value', '>f8')])
>>> from tables import nra

```



```
>>> nra.array(None, descr=table.description._v_nestedDescr)
array(
[],
descr=[('info2', [('info3', [('x', '()f8'), ('y', '()u1')]),
('name', '()S10'), ('value', '()f8')]), ('info1', [('name', '()S10'),
('value', '()f8')]), ('color', '()u4')],
shape=0)
```

You can see we have created two equivalent arrays: one with NumPy (the first) and one with the nra package (the last). The later implements nested record arrays for numarray (see [Appendix C](#)).

Finally, there is a special iterator of the Description class, called `_f_walk` that is able to return you the different columns of the table:

```
>>> for coldescr in table.description._f_walk():
    print "column-->",coldescr

column--> Description([('info2', [('info3', [('x', '()f8'), ('y', '()u1')]),
('name', '()S10'), ('value', '()f8')]),
('info1', [('name', '()S10'), ('value', '()f8')]),
('color', '()u4')])
column--> EnumCol(enum=Enum({'blue': 2, 'green': 1, 'red': 0}), dflt='red',
base=UInt32Atom(shape=(), dflt=0), shape=(),
pos=2)
column--> Description([('info3', [('x', '()f8'), ('y', '()u1')]), ('name',
'()S10'),
('value', '()f8')])
column--> StringCol(itemsize=10, shape=(), dflt='', pos=1)
column--> Float64Col(shape=(), dflt=0.0, pos=2)
column--> Description([('name', '()S10'), ('value', '()f8')])
column--> StringCol(itemsize=10, shape=(), dflt='', pos=0)
column--> Float64Col(shape=(), dflt=0.0, pos=1)
column--> Description([('x', '()f8'), ('y', '()u1')])
column--> Float64Col(shape=(), dflt=1.0, pos=0)
column--> UInt8Col(shape=(), dflt=1, pos=1)
```

See the [Section 4.6.6](#) for the complete listing of attributes and methods of Description.

Well, this is the end of this tutorial. As always, do not forget to close your files:

```
>>> fileh.close()
```

Finally, you may want to have a look at your resulting data file:

```
$ pt dump -d nested-tut.h5
/ (RootGroup) ''
/table (Table(13L,)) ''
Data dump:
[0] (((1.0, 0), 'name2-0', 0.0), ('name1-0', 0.0), 0L)
[1] (((1.0, 1), 'name2-1', 0.0), ('name1-1', 0.0), 1L)
[2] (((1.0, 2), 'name2-2', 0.0), ('name1-2', 0.0), 2L)
[3] (((1.0, 3), 'name2-3', 0.0), ('name1-3', 0.0), 0L)
[4] (((1.0, 4), 'name2-4', 0.0), ('name1-4', 0.0), 1L)
[5] (((1.0, 5), 'name2-5', 0.0), ('name1-5', 0.0), 2L)
[6] (((1.0, 6), 'name2-6', 0.0), ('name1-6', 0.0), 0L)
```

```
[7] (((1.0, 7), 'name2-7', 0.0), ('name1-7', 0.0), 1L)
[8] (((1.0, 8), 'name2-8', 0.0), ('name1-8', 0.0), 2L)
[9] (((1.0, 9), 'name2-9', 0.0), ('name1-9', 0.0), 0L)
[10] (((1.0, 0), 'name2-0', 0.0), ('name1-0', 0.0), 0L)
[11] (((1.0, 4), 'name2-4', 0.0), ('name1-4', 0.0), 1L)
[12] (((1.0, 8), 'name2-8', 0.0), ('name1-8', 0.0), 2L)
/table2 (Table(3L,)) ''
  Data dump:
[0] (((1.0, 0), 'name2-0', 0.0), ('name1-0', 0.0), 0L)
[1] (((1.0, 4), 'name2-4', 0.0), ('name1-4', 0.0), 1L)
[2] (((1.0, 8), 'name2-8', 0.0), ('name1-8', 0.0), 2L)
```

Most of the code in this section is also available in `examples/nested-tut.py`.

All in all, PyTables provides a quite comprehensive toolset to cope with nested structures and address your classification needs. However, caveat emptor, be sure to not nest your data too deeply or you will get inevitably messed interpreting too intertwined lists, tuples and description objects.

3.8. Other examples in PyTables distribution

Feel free to examine the rest of examples in directory `examples/`, and try to understand them. We have written several practical sample scripts to give you an idea of the PyTables capabilities, its way of dealing with HDF5 objects, and how it can be used in the real world.

Chapter 4. Library Reference

PyTables implements several classes to represent the different nodes in the object tree. They are named `File`, `Group`, `Leaf`, `Table`, `Array`, `CArray`, `EArray`, `VArray` and `UnImplemented`. Another one allows the user to complement the information on these different objects; its name is `AttributeSet`. Finally, another important class called `IsDescription` allows to build a `Table` record description by declaring a subclass of it. Many other classes are defined in PyTables, but they can be regarded as helpers whose goal is mainly to declare the *data type properties* of the different first class objects and will be described at the end of this chapter as well.

An important function, called `openFile` is responsible to create, open or append to files. In addition, a few utility functions are defined to guess if the user supplied file is a *PyTables* or *HDF5* file. These are called `isPyTablesFile()` and `isHDF5File()`, respectively. There exists also a function called `whichLibVersion()` that informs about the versions of the underlying C libraries (for example, *HDF5* or *Zlib*) and another called `print_versions()` that prints all the versions of the software that PyTables relies on. Finally, `test()` lets you run the complete test suite from a Python console interactively.

Let's start discussing the first-level variables and functions available to the user, then the different classes defined in PyTables.

4.1. tables variables and functions

4.1.1. Global variables

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| <code>__version__</code> | The PyTables version number. |
| <code>hdf5Version</code> | The underlying HDF5 library version number. |
| <code>is_pro</code> | True for PyTables Professional edition, false otherwise. |

4.1.2. Global functions

`copyFile(srcfilename, dstfilename, overwrite=False, **kwargs)`

An easy way of copying one PyTables file to another.

This function allows you to copy an existing PyTables file named `srcfilename` to another file called `dstfilename`. The source file must exist and be readable. The destination file can be overwritten in place if existing by asserting the `overwrite` argument.

This function is a shorthand for the `File.copyFile()` method, which acts on an already opened file. `kwargs` takes keyword arguments used to customize the copying process. See the documentation of `File.copyFile()` (see [description](#)) for a description of those arguments.

`isHDF5File(filename)`

Determine whether a file is in the HDF5 format.

When successful, it returns a true value if the file is an HDF5 file, false otherwise. If there were problems identifying the file, an `HDF5ExtError` is raised.

`isPyTablesFile(filename)`

Determine whether a file is in the PyTables format.

When successful, it returns a true value if the file is a PyTables file, false otherwise. The true value is the format version string of the file. If there were problems identifying the file, an `HDF5ExtError` is raised.

lrange([start,]stop[, step])

Iterate over long ranges.

This is similar to `xrange()`, but it allows 64-bit arguments on all platforms. The results of the iteration are sequentially yielded in the form of `numpy.int64` values, but getting random individual items is not supported.

Because of the Python 32-bit limitation on object lengths, the `length` attribute (which is also a `numpy.int64` value) should be used instead of the `len()` syntax.

Default `start` and `step` arguments are supported in the same way as in `xrange()`. When the standard `[x]range()` Python objects support 64-bit arguments, this iterator will be deprecated.

openFile(filename, mode='r', title="", trMap={}, rootUEP="/", filters=None, nodeCacheSize=NODE_MAX_SLOTS)

Open a PyTables (or generic HDF5) file and return a `File` object.

Arguments:

filename

The name of the file (supports environment variable expansion). It is suggested that file names have any of the `.h5`, `.hdf` or `.hdf5` extensions, although this is not mandatory.

mode

The mode in which to open the file. It can be one of the following:

'r'

Read-only; no data can be modified.

'w'

Write; a new file is created (an existing file with the same name would be deleted).

'a'

Append; an existing file is opened for reading and writing, and if the file does not exist it is created.

'r+'

It is similar to `'a'`, but the file must already exist.

title

If the file is to be created, a `TITLE` string attribute will be set on the root group with the given value. Otherwise, the title will be read from disk, and this will not have any effect.

trMap

A dictionary to map names in the object tree into different HDF5 names in file. The keys are the Python names, while the values are the HDF5 names. This is useful when you need to name HDF5 nodes with invalid or reserved words in Python and you want to continue using the natural naming facility on the nodes.

rootUEP

The root User Entry Point. This is a group in the HDF5 hierarchy which will be taken as the starting point to create the object tree. It can be whatever existing group in the file, named by its HDF5 path. If it does not exist, an `HDF5ExtError` is issued. Use this if you do not want to build the *entire* object tree, but rather only a *subtree* of it.

filters

An instance of the `Filters` (see [Section 4.14.1](#)) class that provides information about the desired I/O filters applicable to the leaves that hang directly from the *root group*, unless other filter properties are specified for these leaves. Besides, if you do not specify filter properties for child groups, they will inherit these ones, which will in turn propagate to child nodes.

nodeCacheSize

The number of *unreferenced* nodes to be kept in memory. Least recently used nodes are unloaded from memory when this number of loaded nodes is reached. To load a node again, simply access it as usual. Nodes referenced by user variables are not taken into account nor unloaded.

print_versions()

Print all the versions of software that PyTables relies on.

restrict_flavors(keep=['python'])

Disable all flavors except those in `keep`.

Providing an empty `keep` sequence implies disabling all flavors (but the internal one). If the sequence is not specified, only optional flavors are disabled.



Important

Once you disable a flavor, it can not be enabled again.

split_type(type)

Split a PyTables `type` into a PyTables kind and an item size.

Returns a tuple of (`kind`, `itemsizes`). If no item size is present in the `type` (in the form of a precision), the returned item size is `None`.

```
>>> split_type('int32')
('int', 4)
>>> split_type('string')
('string', None)
>>> split_type('int20')
Traceback (most recent call last):
...
ValueError: precision must be a multiple of 8: 20
>>> split_type('foo bar')
Traceback (most recent call last):
...
ValueError: malformed type: 'foo bar'
```

test(verbose=False, heavy=False)

Run all the tests in the test suite.

If `verbose` is set, the test suite will emit messages with full verbosity (not recommended unless you are looking into a certain problem).

If `heavy` is set, the test suite will be run in *heavy* mode (you should be careful with this because it can take a lot of time and resources from your computer).

whichLibVersion(name)

Get version information about a C library.

If the library indicated by `name` is available, this function returns a 3-tuple containing the major library version as an integer, its full version as a string, and the version date as a string. If the library is not available, `None` is returned.

The currently supported library names are `hdf5`, `zlib`, `lzo` and `bzip2`. If another name is given, a `ValueError` is raised.

4.2. The File class

In-memory representation of a PyTables file.

An instance of this class is returned when a PyTables file is opened with the `openFile()` (see [description](#)) function. It offers methods to manipulate (create, rename, delete...) nodes and handle their attributes, as well as methods to traverse the object tree. The *user entry point* to the object tree attached to the HDF5 file is represented in the `rootUEP` attribute. Other attributes are available.

File objects support an *Undo/Redo mechanism* which can be enabled with the `enableUndo()` (see [description](#)) method. Once the Undo/Redo mechanism is enabled, explicit *marks* (with an optional unique name) can be set on the state of the database using the `mark()` (see [description](#)) method. There are two implicit marks which are always available: the initial mark (0) and the final mark (-1). Both the identifier of a mark and its name can be used in *undo* and *redo* operations.

Hierarchy manipulation operations (node creation, movement and removal) and attribute handling operations (setting and deleting) made after a mark can be undone by using the `undo()` (see [description](#)) method, which returns the database to the state of a past mark. If `undo()` is not followed by operations that modify the hierarchy or attributes, the `redo()` (see [description](#)) method can be used to return the database to the state of a future mark. Else, future states of the database are forgotten.

Note that data handling operations can not be undone nor redone by now. Also, hierarchy manipulation operations on nodes that do not support the Undo/Redo mechanism issue an `UndoRedoWarning` *before* changing the database.

The Undo/Redo mechanism is persistent between sessions and can only be disabled by calling the `disableUndo()` (see [description](#)) method.

File objects can also act as context managers when using the `with` statement introduced in Python 2.5. When exiting a context, the file is automatically closed.

4.2.1. File instance variables

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| filename | The name of the opened file. |
| format_version | The PyTables version number of this file. |
| isopen | True if the underlying file is open, false otherwise. |
| mode | The mode in which the file was opened. |
| title | The title of the root group in the file. |
| trMap | A dictionary that maps node names between PyTables and HDF5 domain names. Its initial values are set from the <code>trMap</code> parameter passed to the <code>openFile()</code> (see description) function. You cannot change its contents <i>after</i> a file is opened. |

| | |
|----------------|---|
| rootUEP | The UEP (user entry point) group name in the file (see the <code>openFile()</code> function in description). |
| filters | Default filter properties for the root group (see Section 4.14.1). |
| root | The <i>root</i> of the object tree hierarchy (a <code>Group</code> instance). |

4.2.2. File methods — file handling

close()

Flush all the alive leaves in object tree and close the file.

copyFile(dstfilename, overwrite=False, **kwargs)

Copy the contents of this file to `dstfilename`.

`dstfilename` must be a path string indicating the name of the destination file. If it already exists, the copy will fail with an `IOError`, unless the `overwrite` argument is true, in which case the destination file will be overwritten in place. In this last case, the destination file should be closed or ugly errors will happen.

Additional keyword arguments may be passed to customize the copying process. For instance, title and filters may be changed, user attributes may be or may not be copied, data may be sub-sampled, stats may be collected, etc. Arguments unknown to nodes are simply ignored. Check the documentation for copying operations of nodes to see which options they support.

Copying a file usually has the beneficial side effect of creating a more compact and cleaner version of the original file.

flush()

Flush all the alive leaves in the object tree.

__enter__()

Enter a context and return the same file.

__exit__([*exc_info])

Exit a context and close the file.

__str__()

Return a short string representation of the object tree.

Example of use:

```
>>> f = tables.openFile('data/test.h5')
>>> print f
data/test.h5 (File) 'Table Benchmark'
Last modif.: 'Mon Sep 20 12:40:47 2004'
Object Tree:
/ (Group) 'Table Benchmark'
/tuple0 (Table(100L,)) 'This is the table title'
/group0 (Group) ''
/group0/tuple1 (Table(100L,)) 'This is the table title'
```

```
/group0/group1 (Group) ''  
/group0/group1/tuple2 (Table(100L,)) 'This is the table title'  
/group0/group1/group2 (Group) ''
```

`__repr__()`

Return a detailed string representation of the object tree.

4.2.3. File methods — hierarchy manipulation

`copyChildren(srcgroup, dstgroup, overwrite=False, recursive=False, createparents=False, **kwargs)`

Copy the children of a group into another group.

This method copies the nodes hanging from the source group `srcgroup` into the destination group `dstgroup`. Existing destination nodes can be replaced by asserting the `overwrite` argument. If the `recursive` argument is true, all descendant nodes of `srcnode` are recursively copied. If `createparents` is true, the needed groups for the given destination parent group path to exist will be created.

`kwargs` takes keyword arguments used to customize the copying process. See the documentation of `Group._f_copyChildren()` (see [description](#)) for a description of those arguments.

`copyNode(where, newparent=None, newname=None, name=None, overwrite=False, recursive=False, createparents=False, **kwargs)`

Copy the node specified by `where` and `name` to `newparent/newname`.

`where, name`

These arguments work as in `File.getNode()` (see [description](#)), referencing the node to be acted upon.

`newparent`

The destination group that the node will be copied into (a path name or a `Group` instance). If not specified or `None`, the current parent group is chosen as the new parent.

`newname`

The name to be assigned to the new copy in its destination (a string). If it is not specified or `None`, the current name is chosen as the new name.

Additional keyword arguments may be passed to customize the copying process. The supported arguments depend on the kind of node being copied. See `Group._f_copy()` ([description](#)) and `Leaf.copy()` ([description](#)) for more information on their allowed keyword arguments.

This method returns the newly created copy of the source node (i.e. the destination node). See `Node._f_copy()` ([description](#)) for further details on the semantics of copying nodes.

`createArray(where, name, object, title="", byteorder=None, createparents=False)`

Create a new array with the given name in `where` location. See the `Array` class (in [Section 4.7](#)) for more information on arrays.

`object`

The array or scalar to be saved. Accepted types are NumPy arrays and scalars, `numarray` arrays and string arrays, Numeric arrays and scalars, as well as native Python sequences and scalars, provided that values are regular (i.e. they are not like `[[1, 2], 2]`) and homogeneous (i.e. all the elements are of the same type).

Also, objects that have some of their dimensions equal to 0 are not supported (use an `EArray` node (see [Section 4.9](#)) if you want to store an array with one of its dimensions equal to 0).

byteorder

The byteorder of the data *on disk*, specified as `'little'` or `'big'`. If this is not specified, the byteorder is that of the given object.

See `File.createTable()` ([description](#)) for more information on the rest of parameters.

createCArray(where, name, atom, shape, title="", filters=None, chunkshape=None, byteorder=None, createparents=False)

Create a new chunked array with the given name in where location. See the `CArray` class (in [Section 4.8](#)) for more information on chunked arrays.

atom

An `Atom` (see [Section 4.13.3](#)) instance representing the *type* and *shape* of the atomic objects to be saved.

shape

The shape of the new array.

chunkshape

The shape of the data chunk to be read or written in a single HDF5 I/O operation. Filters are applied to those chunks of data. The dimensionality of `chunkshape` must be the same as that of `shape`. If `None`, a sensible value is calculated (which is recommended).

See `File.createTable()` ([description](#)) for more information on the rest of parameters.

createEArray(where, name, atom, shape, title="", filters=None, expectedrows=1000, chunkshape=None, byteorder=None, createparents=False)

Create a new enlargeable array with the given name in where location. See the `EArray` (in [Section 4.9](#)) class for more information on enlargeable arrays.

atom

An `Atom` (see [Section 4.13.3](#)) instance representing the *type* and *shape* of the atomic objects to be saved.

shape

The shape of the new array. One (and only one) of the shape dimensions *must* be 0. The dimension being 0 means that the resulting `EArray` object can be extended along it. Multiple enlargeable dimensions are not supported right now.

expectedrows

A user estimate about the number of row elements that will be added to the growable dimension in the `EArray` node. If not provided, the default value is 1000 rows. If you plan to create either a much smaller or a much bigger array try providing a guess; this will optimize the HDF5 B-Tree creation and management process time and the amount of memory used. If you want to specify your own chunk size for I/O purposes, see also the `chunkshape` parameter below.

chunkshape

The shape of the data chunk to be read or written in a single HDF5 I/O operation. Filters are applied to those chunks of data. The dimensionality of `chunkshape` must be the same as that of `shape` (beware: no dimension should be 0 this time!). If `None`, a sensible value is calculated (which is recommended).

byteorder

The byteorder of the data *on disk*, specified as `'little'` or `'big'`. If this is not specified, the byteorder is that of the platform.

See `File.createTable()` ([description](#)) for more information on the rest of parameters.

createGroup(where, name, title="", filters=None, createparents=False)

Create a new group with the given name in `where` location. See the `Group` class (in [Section 4.4](#)) for more information on groups.

filters

An instance of the `Filters` class (see [Section 4.14.1](#)) that provides information about the desired I/O filters applicable to the leaves that hang directly from this new group (unless other filter properties are specified for these leaves). Besides, if you do not specify filter properties for its child groups, they will inherit these ones.

See `File.createTable()` ([description](#)) for more information on the rest of parameters.

createTable(where, name, description, title="", filters=None, expectedrows=10000, chunkshape=None, byteorder=None, createparents=False)

Create a new table with the given name in `where` location. See the `Table` (in [Section 4.6](#)) class for more information on tables.

where

The parent group where the new table will hang from. It can be a path string (for example `' /level1/leaf5 '`), or a `Group` instance (see [Section 4.4](#)).

name

The name of the new table.

description

This is an object that describes the table, i.e. how many columns it has, their names, types, shapes, etc. It can be any of the following:

A user-defined class

This should inherit from the `IsDescription` class (see [Section 4.13.1](#)) where table fields are specified.

A dictionary

For example, when you do not know beforehand which structure your table will have).

See [Section 3.4](#) for an example of using a dictionary to describe a table.

A Description instance

You can use the `description` attribute of another table to create a new one with the same structure.

A NumPy (record) array instance

You can use a NumPy array, whether nested or not, and its field structure will be reflected in the new `Table` object. Moreover, if the array has actual data it will be injected into the newly created table. If you are using `numarray` instead of NumPy, you may use one of the objects below for the same purpose.

A RecArray instance

This object from the `numarray` package is also accepted, but it does not give you the possibility to create a nested table. Array data is injected into the new table.

A NestedRecArray instance

Finally, if you want to have nested columns in your table and you are using `numarray`, you can use this object. Array data is injected into the new table.

See [Appendix C](#) for a description of the `NestedRecArray` class.

title

A description for this node (it sets the `TITLE` HDF5 attribute on disk).

filters

An instance of the `Filters` class (see [Section 4.14.1](#)) that provides information about the desired I/O filters to be applied during the life of this object.

expectedrows

A user estimate of the number of records that will be in the table. If not provided, the default value is appropriate for tables up to 10 MB in size (more or less). If you plan to create a bigger table try providing a guess; this will optimize the HDF5 B-Tree creation and management process time and memory used. If you want to specify your own chunk size for I/O purposes, see also the `chunkshape` parameter below.

See [Section 5.1](#) for a discussion on the issue of providing a number of expected rows.

chunkshape

The shape of the data chunk to be read or written in a single HDF5 I/O operation. Filters are applied to those chunks of data. The rank of the `chunkshape` for tables must be 1. If `None`, a sensible value is calculated (which is recommended).

byteorder

The byteorder of data *on disk*, specified as `'little'` or `'big'`. If this is not specified, the byteorder is that of the platform, unless you passed an array as the `description`, in which case its byteorder will be used.

createparents

Whether to create the needed groups for the parent path to exist (not done by default).

createVLArray(where, name, atom, title="", filters=None, expectedsizeinMB=1.0, chunkshape=None, byteorder=None, createparents=False)

Create a new variable-length array with the given name in `where` location. See the `VLArray` (in [Section 4.10](#)) class for more information on variable-length arrays.

atom

An `Atom` (see [Section 4.13.3](#)) instance representing the *type* and *shape* of the atomic objects to be saved.

expectedsizeinMB

An user estimate about the size (in MB) in the final `VLArray` node. If not provided, the default value is 1 MB. If you plan to create either a much smaller or a much bigger array try providing a guess; this will optimize the HDF5 B-Tree creation and management process time and the amount of memory used. If you want to specify your own chunk size for I/O purposes, see also the `chunkshape` parameter below.

chunkshape

The shape of the data chunk to be read or written in a single HDF5 I/O operation. Filters are applied to those chunks of data. The dimensionality of `chunkshape` must be 1. If `None`, a sensible value is calculated (which is recommended).

See `File.createTable()` ([description](#)) for more information on the rest of parameters.

moveNode(where, newparent=None, newname=None, name=None, overwrite=False, createparents=False)

Move the node specified by `where` and `name` to `newparent/newname`.

where, name

These arguments work as in `File.getNode()` (see [description](#)), referencing the node to be acted upon.

newparent

The destination group the node will be moved into (a path name or a `Group` instance). If it is not specified or `None`, the current parent group is chosen as the new parent.

newname

The new name to be assigned to the node in its destination (a string). If it is not specified or `None`, the current name is chosen as the new name.

The other arguments work as in `Node._f_move()` (see [description](#)).

removeNode(where, name=None, recursive=False)

Remove the object node *name* under *where* location.

where, name

These arguments work as in `File.getNode()` (see [description](#)), referencing the node to be acted upon.

recursive

If not supplied or false, the node will be removed only if it has no children; if it does, a `NodeError` will be raised. If supplied with a true value, the node and all its descendants will be completely removed.

renameNode(where, newname, name=None, overwrite=False)

Change the name of the node specified by *where* and *name* to *newname*.

where, name

These arguments work as in `File.getNode()` (see [description](#)), referencing the node to be acted upon.

newname

The new name to be assigned to the node (a string).

overwrite

Whether to recursively remove a node with the same *newname* if it already exists (not done by default).

4.2.4. File methods — tree traversal

getNode(where, name=None, classname=None)

Get the node under *where* with the given name.

where can be a `Node` instance (see [Section 4.3](#)) or a path string leading to a node. If no name is specified, that node is returned.

If a name is specified, this must be a string with the name of a node under *where*. In this case the *where* argument can only lead to a `Group` (see [Section 4.4](#)) instance (else a `TypeError` is raised). The node called *name* under the group *where* is returned.

In both cases, if the node to be returned does not exist, a `NoSuchNodeError` is raised. Please note that hidden nodes are also considered.

If the *classname* argument is specified, it must be the name of a class derived from `Node`. If the node is found but it is not an instance of that class, a `NoSuchNodeError` is also raised.

isVisibleNode(path)

Is the node under `path` visible?

If the node does not exist, a `NoSuchNodeError` is raised.

iterNodes(where, classname=None)

Iterate over children nodes hanging from `where`.

where

This argument works as in `File.getNode()` (see [description](#)), referencing the node to be acted upon.

classname

If the name of a class derived from `Node` (see [Section 4.3](#)) is supplied, only instances of that class (or subclasses of it) will be returned.

The returned nodes are alphanumerically sorted by their name. This is an iterator version of `File.listNodes()` (see [description](#)).

listNodes(where, classname=None)

Return a *list* with children nodes hanging from `where`.

This is a list-returning version of `File.iterNodes()` (see [description](#)).

walkGroups(where='/')

Recursively iterate over groups (not leaves) hanging from `where`.

The `where` group itself is listed first (preorder), then each of its child groups (following an alphanumerical order) is also traversed, following the same procedure. If `where` is not supplied, the root group is used.

The `where` argument can be a path string or a `Group` instance (see [Section 4.4](#)).

walkNodes(where="/", classname="")

Recursively iterate over nodes hanging from `where`.

where

If supplied, the iteration starts from (and includes) this group. It can be a path string or a `Group` instance (see [Section 4.4](#)).

classname

If the name of a class derived from `Node` (see [Section 4.4](#)) is supplied, only instances of that class (or subclasses of it) will be returned.

Example of use:

```
# Recursively print all the nodes hanging from '/detector'.
print "Nodes hanging from group '/detector':"
for node in h5file.walkNodes('/detector', classname='EArray'):
    print node
```

__contains__(path)

Is there a node with that `path`?

Returns `True` if the file has a node with the given `path` (a string), `False` otherwise.

`__iter__()`

Recursively iterate over the nodes in the tree.

This is equivalent to calling `File.walkNodes()` (see [description](#)) with no arguments.

Example of use:

```
# Recursively list all the nodes in the object tree.
h5file = tables.openFile('vlarray1.h5')
print "All nodes in the object tree:"
for node in h5file:
    print node
```

4.2.5. File methods — Undo/Redo support

`disableUndo()`

Disable the Undo/Redo mechanism.

Disabling the Undo/Redo mechanism leaves the database in the current state and forgets past and future database states. This makes `File.mark()` (see [description](#)), `File.undo()` (see [description](#)), `File.redo()` (see [description](#)) and other methods fail with an `UndoRedoError`.

Calling this method when the Undo/Redo mechanism is already disabled raises an `UndoRedoError`.

`enableUndo(filters=Filters(complevel=1))`

Enable the Undo/Redo mechanism.

This operation prepares the database for undoing and redoing modifications in the node hierarchy. This allows `File.mark()` (see [description](#)), `File.undo()` (see [description](#)), `File.redo()` (see [description](#)) and other methods to be called.

The `filters` argument, when specified, must be an instance of class `Filters` (see [Section 4.14.1](#)) and is meant for setting the compression values for the action log. The default is having compression enabled, as the gains in terms of space can be considerable. You may want to disable compression if you want maximum speed for Undo/Redo operations.

Calling this method when the Undo/Redo mechanism is already enabled raises an `UndoRedoError`.

`getCurrentMark()`

Get the identifier of the current mark.

Returns the identifier of the current mark. This can be used to know the state of a database after an application crash, or to get the identifier of the initial implicit mark after a call to `File.enableUndo()` (see [description](#)).

This method can only be called when the Undo/Redo mechanism has been enabled. Otherwise, an `UndoRedoError` is raised.

`goto(mark)`

Go to a specific mark of the database.

Returns the database to the state associated with the specified mark. Both the identifier of a mark and its name can be used.

This method can only be called when the Undo/Redo mechanism has been enabled. Otherwise, an `UndoRedoError` is raised.

isUndoEnabled()

Is the Undo/Redo mechanism enabled?

Returns `True` if the Undo/Redo mechanism has been enabled for this file, `False` otherwise. Please note that this mechanism is persistent, so a newly opened PyTables file may already have Undo/Redo support enabled.

mark(name=None)

Mark the state of the database.

Creates a mark for the current state of the database. A unique (and immutable) identifier for the mark is returned. An optional name (a string) can be assigned to the mark. Both the identifier of a mark and its name can be used in `File.undo()` (see [description](#)) and `File.redo()` (see [description](#)) operations. When the name has already been used for another mark, an `UndoRedoError` is raised.

This method can only be called when the Undo/Redo mechanism has been enabled. Otherwise, an `UndoRedoError` is raised.

redo(mark=None)

Go to a future state of the database.

Returns the database to the state associated with the specified mark. Both the identifier of a mark and its name can be used. If the mark is omitted, the next created mark is used. If there are no future marks, or the specified mark is not newer than the current one, an `UndoRedoError` is raised.

This method can only be called when the Undo/Redo mechanism has been enabled. Otherwise, an `UndoRedoError` is raised.

undo(mark=None)

Go to a past state of the database.

Returns the database to the state associated with the specified mark. Both the identifier of a mark and its name can be used. If the mark is omitted, the last created mark is used. If there are no past marks, or the specified mark is not older than the current one, an `UndoRedoError` is raised.

This method can only be called when the Undo/Redo mechanism has been enabled. Otherwise, an `UndoRedoError` is raised.

4.2.6. File methods — attribute handling

copyNodeAttrs(where, dstnode, name=None)

Copy PyTables attributes from one node to another.

where, name

These arguments work as in `File.getNode()` (see [description](#)), referencing the node to be acted upon.

dstnode

The destination node where the attributes will be copied to. It can be a path string or a `Node` instance (see [Section 4.3](#)).

delNodeAttr(where, attrname, name=None)

Delete a PyTables attribute from the given node.

where, name

These arguments work as in `File.getNode()` (see [description](#)), referencing the node to be acted upon.

attrname

The name of the attribute to delete. If the named attribute does not exist, an `AttributeError` is raised.

getNodeAttr(where, attrname, name=None)

Get a PyTables attribute from the given node.

where, name

These arguments work as in `File.getNode()` (see [description](#)), referencing the node to be acted upon.

attrname

The name of the attribute to retrieve. If the named attribute does not exist, an `AttributeError` is raised.

setNodeAttr(where, attrname, attrvalue, name=None)

Set a PyTables attribute for the given node.

where, name

These arguments work as in `File.getNode()` (see [description](#)), referencing the node to be acted upon.

attrname

The name of the attribute to set.

attrvalue

The value of the attribute to set. Any kind of Python object (like strings, ints, floats, lists, tuples, dicts, small NumPy/Numeric/numarray objects...) can be stored as an attribute. However, if necessary, `cPickle` is automatically used so as to serialize objects that you might want to save. See the `AttributeSet` class (in [Section 4.12](#)) for details.

If the node already has a large number of attributes, a `PerformanceWarning` is issued.

4.3. The Node class

Abstract base class for all PyTables nodes.

This is the base class for *all* nodes in a PyTables hierarchy. It is an abstract class, i.e. it may not be directly instantiated; however, every node in the hierarchy is an instance of this class.

A PyTables node is always hosted in a PyTables *file*, under a *parent group*, at a certain *depth* in the node hierarchy. A node knows its own *name* in the parent group and its own *path name* in the file. When using a translation map (see the `File` class in [Section 4.2](#)), its *HDF5 name* might differ from its PyTables name.

All the previous information is location-dependent, i.e. it may change when moving or renaming a node in the hierarchy. A node also has location-independent information, such as its *HDF5 object identifier* and its *attribute set*.

This class gathers the operations and attributes (both location-dependent and independent) which are common to all PyTables nodes, whatever their type is. Nonetheless, due to natural naming restrictions, the names of all of these members start with a reserved prefix (see the `Group` class in [Section 4.4](#)).

Sub-classes with no children (i.e. *leaf nodes*) may define new methods, attributes and properties to avoid natural naming restrictions. For instance, `_v_attrs` may be shortened to `attrs` and `_f_rename` to `rename`. However, the original methods and attributes should still be available.

4.3.1. Node instance variables — location dependent

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| <code>_v_depth</code> | The depth of this node in the tree (an non-negative integer value). |
| <code>_v_file</code> | The hosting <code>File</code> instance (see Section 4.2). |
| <code>_v_hdf5name</code> | The name of this node in the hosting HDF5 file (a string). |
| <code>_v_name</code> | The name of this node in its parent group (a string). |
| <code>_v_parent</code> | The parent <code>Group</code> instance (see Section 4.4). |
| <code>_v_pathname</code> | The path of this node in the tree (a string). |

4.3.2. Node instance variables — location independent

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| <code>_v_attrs</code> | The associated <code>AttributeSet</code> instance (see Section 4.12). |
| <code>_v_isopen</code> | Whether this node is open or not. |
| <code>_v_objectID</code> | A node identifier (may change from run to run). |

4.3.3. Node instance variables — attribute shorthands

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| <code>_v_title</code> | A description of this node. A shorthand for <code>TITLE</code> attribute. |
|-----------------------|---|

4.3.4. Node methods — hierarchy manipulation

`_f_close()`

Close this node in the tree.

This releases all resources held by the node, so it should not be used again. On nodes with data, it may be flushed to disk.

The closing operation is *not* recursive, i.e. closing a group does not close its children.

`_f_copy(newparent=None, newname=None, overwrite=False, recursive=False, createparents=False, **kwargs)`

Copy this node and return the new node.

Creates and returns a copy of the node, maybe in a different place in the hierarchy. `newparent` can be a `Group` object (see [Section 4.4](#)) or a pathname in string form. If it is not specified or `None`, the current parent group is chosen as the new parent. `newname` must be a string with a new name. If it is not specified or `None`, the current name is chosen as the new name. If `recursive` copy is stated, all descendants are copied as well. If `createparents` is true, the needed groups for the given new parent group path to exist will be created.

Copying a node across databases is supported but can not be undone. Copying a node over itself is not allowed, nor is recursively copying a node into itself. These result in a `NodeError`. Copying over another existing node is similarly not allowed, unless the optional `overwrite` argument is true, in which case that node is recursively removed before copying.

Additional keyword arguments may be passed to customize the copying process. For instance, title and filters may be changed, user attributes may be or may not be copied, data may be sub-sampled, stats may be collected, etc. See the documentation for the particular node type.

Using only the first argument is equivalent to copying the node to a new location without changing its name. Using only the second argument is equivalent to making a copy of the node in the same group.

`_f_isVisible()`

Is this node visible?

`_f_move(newparent=None, newname=None, overwrite=False, createparents=False)`

Move or rename this node.

Moves a node into a new parent group, or changes the name of the node. `newparent` can be a `Group` object (see [Section 4.4](#)) or a pathname in string form. If it is not specified or `None`, the current parent group is chosen as the new parent. `newname` must be a string with a new name. If it is not specified or `None`, the current name is chosen as the new name. If `createparents` is true, the needed groups for the given new parent group path to exist will be created.

Moving a node across databases is not allowed, nor is moving a node *into* itself. These result in a `NodeError`. However, moving a node *over* itself is allowed and simply does nothing. Moving over another existing node is similarly not allowed, unless the optional `overwrite` argument is true, in which case that node is recursively removed before moving.

Usually, only the first argument will be used, effectively moving the node to a new location without changing its name. Using only the second argument is equivalent to renaming the node in place.

`_f_remove(recursive=False)`

Remove this node from the hierarchy.

If the node has children, recursive removal must be stated by giving `recursive` a true value; otherwise, a `NodeError` will be raised.

`_f_rename(newname, overwrite=False)`

Rename this node in place.

Changes the name of a node to *newname* (a string). If a node with the same *newname* already exists and `overwrite` is true, recursively remove it before renaming.

4.3.5. Node methods — attribute handling

`_f_delAttr(name)`

Delete a PyTables attribute from this node.

If the named attribute does not exist, an `AttributeError` is raised.

`__f_getAttr(name)`

Get a PyTables attribute from this node.

If the named attribute does not exist, an `AttributeError` is raised.

`__f_setAttr(name, value)`

Set a PyTables attribute for this node.

If the node already has a large number of attributes, a `PerformanceWarning` is issued.

4.4. The Group class

Basic PyTables grouping structure.

Instances of this class are grouping structures containing *child* instances of zero or more groups or leaves, together with supporting metadata. Each group has exactly one *parent* group.

Working with groups and leaves is similar in many ways to working with directories and files, respectively, in a Unix filesystem. As with Unix directories and files, objects in the object tree are often described by giving their full (or absolute) path names. This full path can be specified either as a string (like in `'/group1/group2'`) or as a complete object path written in *natural naming* schema (like in `file.root.group1.group2`). See [Section 1.2](#) for more information on natural naming.

A collateral effect of the *natural naming* schema is that the names of members in the `Group` class and its instances must be carefully chosen to avoid colliding with existing children node names. For this reason and to avoid polluting the children namespace all members in a `Group` start with some reserved prefix, like `__f__` (for public methods), `__g__` (for private ones), `__v__` (for instance variables) or `__c__` (for class variables). Any attempt to create a new child node whose name starts with one of these prefixes will raise a `ValueError` exception.

Another effect of natural naming is that children named after Python keywords or having names not valid as Python identifiers (e.g. `class`, `$a` or `44`) can not be accessed using the `node.child` syntax. You will be forced to use `node.__f_getChild(child)` to access them (which is recommended for programmatic accesses). You can also make use of the `trMap` (translation map dictionary) parameter in the `openFile()` function (see [description](#)) in order to translate HDF5 names not suited for natural naming into more convenient ones, so that you can go on using `file.root.group1.group2` syntax or `getattr()`.

You will also need to use `__f_getChild()` to access an existing child node if you set a Python attribute in the `Group` with the same name as that node (you will get a `NaturalNameWarning` when doing this).

4.4.1. Group instance variables

The following instance variables are provided in addition to those in `Node` (see [Section 4.3](#)):

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| <code>__v_nchildren</code> | The number of children hanging from this group. |
| <code>__v_filters</code> | Default filter properties for child nodes. You can (and are encouraged to) use this property to get, set and delete the <code>FILTERS</code> HDF5 attribute of the group, which stores a <code>Filters</code> instance (see Section 4.14.1). When the group has no such attribute, a default <code>Filters</code> instance is used. |
| <code>__v_groups</code> | Dictionary with all groups hanging from this group. |

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| <code>_v_hidden</code> | Dictionary with all hidden nodes hanging from this group. |
| <code>_v_leaves</code> | Dictionary with all leaves hanging from this group. |
| <code>_v_children</code> | Dictionary with all nodes hanging from this group. |

4.4.2. Group methods

Caveat: The following methods are documented for completeness, and they can be used without any problem. However, you should use the high-level counterpart methods in the `File` class (see [Section 4.2](#), because they are most used in documentation and examples, and are a bit more powerful than those exposed here.

The following methods are provided in addition to those in `Node` (see [Section 4.3](#)):

`_f_close()`

Close this node in the tree.

This method has the behavior described in `Node._f_close()` (see [description](#)). It should be noted that this operation disables access to nodes descending from this group. Therefore, if you want to explicitly close them, you will need to walk the nodes hanging from this group *before* closing it.

`_f_copy(newparent, newname, overwrite=False, recursive=False, createparents=False, **kwargs)`

Copy this node and return the new one.

This method has the behavior described in `Node._f_copy()` (see [description](#)). In addition, it recognizes the following keyword arguments:

title

The new title for the destination. If omitted or `None`, the original title is used. This only applies to the topmost node in recursive copies.

filters

Specifying this parameter overrides the original filter properties in the source node. If specified, it must be an instance of the `Filters` class (see [Section 4.14.1](#)). The default is to copy the filter properties from the source node.

copyuserattrs

You can prevent the user attributes from being copied by setting this parameter to `False`. The default is to copy them.

stats

This argument may be used to collect statistics on the copy process. When used, it should be a dictionary with keys `'groups'`, `'leaves'` and `'bytes'` having a numeric value. Their values will be incremented to reflect the number of groups, leaves and bytes, respectively, that have been copied during the operation.

`_f_copyChildren(dstgroup, overwrite=False, recursive=False, createparents=False, **kwargs)`

Copy the children of this group into another group.

Children hanging directly from this group are copied into `dstgroup`, which can be a `Group` (see [Section 4.4](#)) object or its pathname in string form. If `createparents` is true, the needed groups for the given destination group path to exist will be created.

The operation will fail with a `NodeError` if there is a child node in the destination group with the same name as one of the copied children from this one, unless `overwrite` is `true`; in this case, the former child node is recursively removed before copying the later.

By default, nodes descending from children groups of this node are not copied. If the `recursive` argument is `true`, all descendant nodes of this node are recursively copied.

Additional keyword arguments may be passed to customize the copying process. For instance, title and filters may be changed, user attributes may be or may not be copied, data may be sub-sampled, stats may be collected, etc. Arguments unknown to nodes are simply ignored. Check the documentation for copying operations of nodes to see which options they support.

`_f_getChild(childname)`

Get the child called `childname` of this group.

If the child exists (be it visible or not), it is returned. Else, a `NoSuchNodeError` is raised.

Using this method is recommended over `getattr()` when doing programmatic accesses to children if the `childname` is unknown beforehand or when its name is not a valid Python identifier.

`_f_iterNodes(classname=None)`

Iterate over children nodes.

Child nodes are yielded alphanumerically sorted by node name. If the name of a class derived from `Node` (see [Section 4.3](#)) is supplied in the `classname` parameter, only instances of that class (or subclasses of it) will be returned.

This is an iterator version of `Group._f_listNodes()` (see [description](#)).

`_f_listNodes(classname=None)`

Return a *list* with children nodes.

This is a list-returning version of `Group._f_iterNodes()` (see [description](#)).

`_f_walkGroups()`

Recursively iterate over descendent groups (not leaves).

This method starts by yielding *self*, and then it goes on to recursively iterate over all child groups in alphanumerical order, top to bottom (preorder), following the same procedure.

`_f_walkNodes(classname=None)`

Iterate over descendent nodes.

This method recursively walks *self* top to bottom (preorder), iterating over child groups in alphanumerical order, and yielding nodes. If `classname` is supplied, only instances of the named class are yielded.

If `classname` is `Group`, it behaves like `Group._f_walkGroups()` (see [the section called “_f_walkGroups\(\)”](#)), yielding only groups. If you don't want a recursive behavior, use `Group._f_iterNodes()` (see [description](#)) instead.

Example of use:

```
# Recursively print all the arrays hanging from '/'
print "Arrays in the object tree '':"

```

```
for array in h5file.root._f_walkNodes('Array', recursive=True):
    print array
```

4.4.3. Group special methods

Following are described the methods that automatically trigger actions when a Group instance is accessed in a special way.

This class defines the `__setattr__`, `__getattr__` and `__delattr__` methods, and they set, get and delete *ordinary Python attributes* as normally intended. In addition to that, `__getattr__` allows getting *child nodes* by their name for the sake of easy interaction on the command line, as long as there is no Python attribute with the same name. Groups also allow the interactive completion (when using `readline`) of the names of child nodes. For instance:

```
nchild = group._v_nchildren # get a Python attribute

# Add a Table child called 'table' under 'group'.
h5file.createTable(group, 'table', myDescription)

table = group.table          # get the table child instance
group.table = 'foo'          # set a Python attribute
# (PyTables warns you here about using the name of a child node.)
foo = group.table            # get a Python attribute
del group.table              # delete a Python attribute
table = group.table          # get the table child instance again
```

`__contains__(name)`

Is there a child with that name?

Returns a true value if the group has a child node (visible or hidden) with the given *name* (a string), false otherwise.

`__delattr__(name)`

Delete a Python attribute called name.

This method deletes an *ordinary Python attribute* from the object. It does *not* remove children nodes from this group; for that, use `File.removeNode()` (see [description](#)) or `Node._f_remove()` (see [description](#)). It does *neither* delete a PyTables node attribute; for that, use `File.delNodeAttr()` (see [description](#)), `Node._f_delAttr()` (see [description](#)) or `Node._v_attrs` (see [Section 4.3.2](#)).

If there is an attribute and a child node with the same name, the child node will be made accessible again via natural naming.

`__getattr__(name)`

Get a Python attribute or child node called name.

If the object has a Python attribute called name, its value is returned. Else, if the node has a child node called name, it is returned. Else, an `AttributeError` is raised.

`__iter__()`

Iterate over the child nodes hanging directly from the group.

This iterator is *not* recursive. Example of use:

```
# Non-recursively list all the nodes hanging from '/detector'
print "Nodes in '/detector' group:"
for node in h5file.root.detector:
    print node
```

`__repr__()`

Return a detailed string representation of the group.

Example of use:

```
>>> f = tables.openFile('data/test.h5')
>>> f.root.group0
/group0 (Group) 'First Group'
    children := ['tuple1' (Table), 'group1' (Group)]
```

`__setattr__(name, value)`

Set a Python attribute called name with the given value.

This method stores an *ordinary Python attribute* in the object. It does *not* store new children nodes under this group; for that, use the `File.create*()` methods (see the `File` class in [Section 4.2](#)). It does *neither* store a PyTables node attribute; for that, use `File.setNodeAttr()` (see [description](#)), `Node._f_setAttr()` (see [description](#)) or `Node._v_attrs` (see [Section 4.3.2](#)).

If there is already a child node with the same name, a `NaturalNameWarning` will be issued and the child node will not be accessible via natural naming nor `getattr()`. It will still be available via `File.getNode()` (see [description](#)), `Group._f_getChild()` (see [description](#)) and children dictionaries in the group (if visible).

`__str__()`

Return a short string representation of the group.

Example of use:

```
>>> f=tables.openFile('data/test.h5')
>>> print f.root.group0
/group0 (Group) 'First Group'
```

4.5. The Leaf class

Abstract base class for all PyTables leaves.

A leaf is a node (see the `Node` class in [Section 4.3](#)) which hangs from a group (see the `Group` class in [Section 4.4](#)) but, unlike a group, it can not have any further children below it (i.e. it is an end node).

This definition includes all nodes which contain actual data (datasets handled by the `Table` —see [Section 4.6](#)—, `Array` —see [Section 4.7](#)—, `CArray` —see [Section 4.8](#)—, `EArray` —see [Section 4.9](#)— and `VArray` —see [Section 4.10](#)— classes) and unsupported nodes (the `UnImplemented` class —[Section 4.11](#)) —these classes do in fact inherit from `Leaf`.

4.5.1. Leaf instance variables

These instance variables are provided in addition to those in `Node` (see [Section 4.3](#)):

byteorder The byte ordering of the leaf data *on disk*.

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| chunkshape | <p>The HDF5 chunk size for chunked leaves (a tuple).</p> <p>This is read-only because you cannot change the chunk size of a leaf once it has been created.</p> |
| extdim | <p>The index of the enlargeable dimension (-1 if none).</p> |
| filters | <p>Filter properties for this leaf —see <code>Filters</code> in Section 4.14.1.</p> |
| flavor | <p>The type of data object read from this leaf.</p> <p>It can be any of 'numpy', 'numarray', 'numeric' or 'python' (the set of supported flavors depends on which packages you have installed on your system).</p> <p>You can (and are encouraged to) use this property to get, set and delete the FLAVOR HDF5 attribute of the leaf. When the leaf has no such attribute, the default flavor is used.</p> |
| maindim | <p>The dimension along which iterators work.</p> <p>Its value is 0 (i.e. the first dimension) when the dataset is not extendable, and <code>self.extdim</code> (where available) for extendable ones.</p> |
| nrows | <p>The length of the main dimension of the leaf data.</p> |
| nrowsinbuf | <p>The number of rows that fit in internal input buffers.</p> <p>You can change this to fine-tune the speed or memory requirements of your application.</p> |
| shape | <p>The shape of data in the leaf.</p> |

4.5.2. Leaf instance variables — aliases

The following are just easier-to-write aliases to their Node (see [Section 4.3](#)) counterparts (indicated between parentheses):

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| attrs | <p>The associated <code>AttributeSet</code> instance —see Section 4.12— (<code>Node._v_attrs</code>).</p> |
| hdf5name | <p>The name of this node in the hosting HDF5 file (<code>Node._v_hdf5name</code>).</p> |
| name | <p>The name of this node in its parent group (<code>Node._v_name</code>).</p> |
| objectID | <p>A node identifier (may change from run to run). (<code>Node._v_objectID</code>).</p> |
| title | <p>A description for this node (<code>Node._v_title</code>).</p> |

4.5.3. Leaf methods

close(flush=True)

Close this node in the tree.

This method is completely equivalent to `Leaf._f_close()` (see [description](#)).

copy(newparent, newname, overwrite=False, createparents=False, **kwargs)

Copy this node and return the new one.

This method has the behavior described in `Node._f_copy()` (see [description](#)). Please note that there is no recursive flag since leaves do not have child nodes. In addition, this method recognizes the following keyword arguments:

title

The new title for the destination. If omitted or `None`, the original title is used.

filters

Specifying this parameter overrides the original filter properties in the source node. If specified, it must be an instance of the `Filters` class (see [Section 4.14.1](#)). The default is to copy the filter properties from the source node.

copyuserattrs

You can prevent the user attributes from being copied by setting this parameter to `False`. The default is to copy them.

start, stop, step

Specify the range of rows to be copied; the default is to copy all the rows.

stats

This argument may be used to collect statistics on the copy process. When used, it should be a dictionary with keys `'groups'`, `'leaves'` and `'bytes'` having a numeric value. Their values will be incremented to reflect the number of groups, leaves and bytes, respectively, that have been copied during the operation.

delAttr(name)

Delete a PyTables attribute from this node.

This method has the behavior described in `Node._f_delAttr()` (see [description](#)).

flush()

Flush pending data to disk.

Saves whatever remaining buffered data to disk. It also releases I/O buffers, so if you are filling many datasets in the same PyTables session, please call `flush()` extensively so as to help PyTables to keep memory requirements low.

getAttr(name)

Get a PyTables attribute from this node.

This method has the behavior described in `Node._f_getAttr()` (see [description](#)).

isVisible()

Is this node visible?

This method has the behavior described in `Node._f_isVisible()` (see [description](#)).

move(newparent=None, newname=None, overwrite=False, createparents=False)

Move or rename this node.

This method has the behavior described in `Node._f_move()` (see [description](#)).

rename(newname)

Rename this node in place.

This method has the behavior described in `Node._f_rename()` (see [description](#)).

remove()

Remove this node from the hierarchy.

This method has the behavior described in `Node._f_remove()` (see [description](#)). Please note that there is no recursive flag since leaves do not have child nodes.

setAttr(name, value)

Set a PyTables attribute for this node.

This method has the behavior described in `Node._f_setAttr()` (see [description](#)).

__len__()

Return the length of the main dimension of the leaf data.

__f_close(flush=True)

Close this node in the tree.

This method has the behavior described in `Node._f_close()` (see [description](#)). Besides that, the optional argument `flush` tells whether to flush pending data to disk or not before closing.

4.6. The Table class

This class represents heterogeneous datasets in an HDF5 file.

Tables are leaves (see the `Leaf` class in [Section 4.5](#)) whose data consists of a unidimensional sequence of *rows*, where each row contains one or more *fields*. Fields have an associated unique *name* and *position*, with the first field having position 0. All rows have the same fields, which are arranged in *columns*.

Fields can have any type supported by the `Col` class (see [Section 4.13.2](#)) and its descendants, which support multidimensional data. Moreover, a field can be *nested* (to an arbitrary depth), meaning that it includes further fields inside. A field named `x` inside a nested field `a` in a table can be accessed as the field `a/x` (its *path name*) from the table.

The structure of a table is declared by its description, which is made available in the `Table.description` attribute (see [Section 4.6.1](#)).

This class provides new methods to read, write and search table data efficiently. It also provides special Python methods to allow accessing the table as a normal sequence or array (with extended slicing supported).

PyTables supports *in-kernel* searches working simultaneously on several columns using complex conditions. These are faster than selections using Python expressions. See the `Tables.where()` method —[description](#)— for more information on in-kernel searches. See also [Section 5.2.1](#) for a detailed review of the advantages and shortcomings of in-kernel searches.

Non-nested columns can be *indexed*. Searching an indexed column can be several times faster than searching a non-nested one. Search methods automatically take advantage of indexing where available.



Note

Column indexing is only available in PyTables Pro.

When iterating a table, an object from the `Row` (see [Section 4.6.7](#)) class is used. This object allows to read and write data one row at a time, as well as to perform queries which are not supported by in-kernel syntax (at a much lower speed, of course). See the tutorial sections in [Chapter 3](#) on how to use the `Row` interface.

Objects of this class support access to individual columns via *natural naming* through the `Table.cols` accessor (see [Section 4.6.1](#)). Nested columns are mapped to `Cols` instances, and non-nested ones to `Column` instances. See the `Column` class in [Section 4.6.9](#) for examples of this feature.

4.6.1. Table instance variables

The following instance variables are provided in addition to those in `Leaf` (see [Section 4.5](#)). Please note that there are several `col*` dictionaries to ease retrieving information about a column directly by its path name, avoiding the need to walk through `Table.description` or `Table.cols`.

| | |
|------------------|---|
| autoIndex | <p>Automatically keep column indexes up to date?</p> <p>Setting this value states whether existing indexes should be automatically updated after an append operation or recomputed after an index-invalidating operation (i.e. removal and modification of rows). The default is true.</p> <p>This value gets into effect whenever a column is altered. If you don't have automatic indexing activated and you want to do an immediate update use <code>Table.flushRowsToIndex()</code> (see Section); for immediate reindexing of invalidated indexes, use <code>Table.reIndexDirty()</code> (see Section).</p> <p>This value is persistent.</p> |
|------------------|---|



Note

Column indexing is only available in PyTables Pro.

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| coldescrs | Maps the name of a column to its <code>Col</code> description (see Section 4.13.2). |
| coldflts | Maps the name of a column to its default value. |
| coldtypes | Maps the name of a column to its NumPy data type. |
| colindexed | Is the column which name is used as a key indexed? |



Note

Column indexing is only available in PyTables Pro.

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| colinstances | Maps the name of a column to its <code>Column</code> (see Section 4.6.9) or <code>Cols</code> (see Section 4.6.8) instance. |
| colnames | A list containing the names of <i>top-level</i> columns in the table. |
| colpathnames | A list containing the pathnames of <i>bottom-level</i> columns in the table. |

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| | These are the leaf columns obtained when walking the table description left-to-right, bottom-first. Columns inside a nested column have slashes (/) separating name components in their pathname. |
| cols | A <code>Cols</code> instance that provides <i>natural naming</i> access to non-nested (<code>Column</code> , see Section 4.6.9) and nested (<code>Cols</code> , see Section 4.6.8) columns. |
| coltypes | Maps the name of a column to its PyTables data type. |
| description | A <code>Description</code> instance (see Section 4.6.6) reflecting the structure of the table. |
| extdim | The index of the enlargeable dimension (always 0 for tables). |
| indexed | Does this table have any indexed columns? |



Note

Column indexing is only available in PyTables Pro.

indexedcolpathnames

List of the pathnames of indexed columns in the table.



Note

Column indexing is only available in PyTables Pro.

indexFilters

Filters used to compress indexes.

Setting this value to a `Filters` (see [Section 4.14.1](#)) instance determines the compression to be used for indexes. Setting it to `None` means that no filters will be used for indexes. The default is zlib compression level 1 with shuffling.

This value is used when creating new indexes or recomputing old ones. To apply it to existing indexes, use `Table.reIndex()` (see [Section](#)).

This value is persistent.



Note

Column indexing is only available in PyTables Pro.

nrows

The current number of rows in the table.

rowThe associated `Row` instance (see [Section 4.6.7](#)).**rowsize**

The size in bytes of each row in the table.

4.6.2. Table methods — reading

col(name)

Get a column from the table.

If a column called `name` exists in the table, it is read and returned as a NumPy object, or as a `numarray` object (depending on the flavor of the table). If it does not exist, a `KeyError` is raised.

Example of use:

```
narray = table.col('var2')
```

That statement is equivalent to:

```
narray = table.read(field='var2')
```

Here you can see how this method can be used as a shorthand for the `Table.read()` method (see [description](#)).

iterrows(start=None, stop=None, step=None)

Iterate over the table using a `Row` instance (see [Section 4.6.7](#)).

If a range is not supplied, *all the rows* in the table are iterated upon—you can also use the `Table.__iter__()` special method (see [description](#)) for that purpose. If you want to iterate over a given *range of rows* in the table, you may use the `start`, `stop` and `step` parameters, which have the same meaning as in `Table.read()` (see [description](#)).

Example of use:

```
result = [ row['var2'] for row in table.iterrows(step=5)
           if row['var1'] <= 20 ]
```



Note

This iterator can be nested (see `Table.where()` —[description](#)— for an example).



Warning

When in the middle of a table row iterator, you should not use methods that can change the number of rows in the table (like `Table.append()` or `Table.removeRows()`) or unexpected errors will happen.

itersequence(sequence, sort=True)

Iterate over a *sequence* of row coordinates.

A true value for `sort` means that the *sequence* will be sorted so that I/O *might* perform better. If your *sequence* is already sorted or you don't want to sort it, leave this parameter as false. The default is not to sort the *sequence*.



Note

This iterator can be nested (see `Table.where()` —[description](#)— for an example).

read(start=None, stop=None, step=None, field=None)

Get data in the table as a (record) array.

The `start`, `stop` and `step` parameters can be used to select only a *range of rows* in the table. Their meanings are the same as in the built-in `range()` Python function, except that negative values of `step` are not allowed yet. Moreover, if only `start` is specified, then `stop` will be set to `start+1`. If you do not specify neither `start` nor `stop`, then *all the rows* in the table are selected.

If `field` is supplied only the named column will be selected. If the column is not nested, an *array* of the current flavor will be returned; if it is, a *record array* will be used instead. If no `field` is specified, all the columns will be returned in a record array of the current flavor. More specifically, when the flavor is `'numarray'` and a record array is needed, a `NestedRecArray` (see [Appendix C](#)) will be returned.

Columns under a nested column can be specified in the `field` parameter by using a slash character (`/`) as a separator (e.g. `'position/x'`).

readCoordinates(coords, field=None)

Get a set of rows given their indexes as a (record) array.

This method works much like the `read()` method (see [description](#)), but it uses a sequence (`coords`) of row indexes to select the wanted columns, instead of a column range.

The selected rows are returned in an array or record array of the current flavor.

__getitem__(key)

Get a row or a range of rows from the table.

If the `key` argument is an integer, the corresponding table row is returned as a record of the current flavor. If `key` is a slice, the range of rows determined by it is returned as a record array of the current flavor.

Example of use:

```
record = table[4]
recarray = table[4:1000:2]
```

Those statements are equivalent to:

```
record = table.read(start=4)[0]
recarray = table.read(start=4, stop=1000, step=2)
```

Here you can see how indexing and slicing can be used as shorthands for the `read()` (see [description](#)) method.

__iter__()

Iterate over the table using a `Row` instance (see [Section 4.6.7](#)).

This is equivalent to calling `Table.iterrows()` (see [description](#)) with default arguments, i.e. it iterates over *all the rows* in the table.

Example of use:

```
result = [ row['var2'] for row in table
           if row['var1'] <= 20 ]
```

Which is equivalent to:

```
result = [ row['var2'] for row in table.iterrows()
           if row['var1'] <= 20 ]
```



Note

This iterator can be nested (see `Table.where()` —[description](#)— for an example).

4.6.3. Table methods — writing

append(rows)

Append a sequence of rows to the end of the table.

The `rows` argument may be any object which can be converted to a record array compliant with the table structure (otherwise, a `ValueError` is raised). This includes NumPy record arrays, `RecArray` or `NestedRecArray` objects if `numarray` is available, lists of tuples or array records, and a string or Python buffer.

Example of use:

```
from tables import *
class Particle(IsDescription):
    name          = StringCol(16, pos=1) # 16-character String
    lati          = IntCol(pos=2)        # integer
    longi         = IntCol(pos=3)        # integer
    pressure      = Float32Col(pos=4)    # float (single-precision)
    temperature   = FloatCol(pos=5)     # double (double-precision)

fileh = openFile('test4.h5', mode='w')
table = fileh.createTable(fileh.root, 'table', Particle, "A table")
# Append several rows in only one call
table.append([("Particle:    10", 10, 0, 10*10, 10**2),
              ("Particle:    11", 11, -1, 11*11, 11**2),
              ("Particle:    12", 12, -2, 12*12, 12**2)])
fileh.close()
```

See [Appendix C](#) if you are using `numarray` and you want to append data to nested columns.

modifyColumn(start=None, stop=None, step=1, column=None, colname=None)

Modify one single column in the row slice `[start:stop:step]`.

The `colname` argument specifies the name of the column in the table to be modified with the data given in `column`. This method returns the number of rows modified. Should the modification exceed the length of the table, an `IndexError` is raised before changing data.

The `column` argument may be any object which can be converted to a (record) array compliant with the structure of the column to be modified (otherwise, a `ValueError` is raised). This includes NumPy (record) arrays, `NumArray`, `RecArray` or `NestedRecArray` objects if `numarray` is available, Numeric arrays if available, lists of scalars, tuples or array records, and a string or Python buffer.

See [Appendix C](#) if you are using `numarray` and you want to modify data in a nested column.

modifyColumns(start=None, stop=None, step=1, columns=None, names=None)

Modify a series of columns in the row slice `[start:stop:step]`.

The `names` argument specifies the names of the columns in the table to be modified with the data given in `columns`. This method returns the number of rows modified. Should the modification exceed the length of the table, an `IndexError` is raised before changing data.

The `columns` argument may be any object which can be converted to a record array compliant with the structure of the columns to be modified (otherwise, a `ValueError` is raised). This includes NumPy record arrays, `RecArray` or `NestedRecArray` objects if `numarray` is available, lists of tuples or array records, and a string or Python buffer.

See [Appendix C](#) if you are using `numarray` and you want to modify data in nested columns.

modifyRows(start=None, stop=None, step=1, rows=None)

Modify a series of rows in the slice `[start:stop:step]`.

The values in the selected rows will be modified with the data given in `rows`. This method returns the number of rows modified. Should the modification exceed the length of the table, an `IndexError` is raised before changing data.

The possible values for the `rows` argument are the same as in `Table.append()` (see [description](#)).

See [Appendix C](#) if you are using `numarray` and you want to modify data in nested columns.

removeRows(start, stop=None)

Remove a range of rows in the table.

If only `start` is supplied, only this row is to be deleted. If a range is supplied, i.e. both the `start` and `stop` parameters are passed, all the rows in the range are removed. A `step` parameter is not supported, and it is not foreseen to be implemented anytime soon.

start

Sets the starting row to be removed. It accepts negative values meaning that the count starts from the end. A value of 0 means the first row.

stop

Sets the last row to be removed to `stop-1`, i.e. the end point is omitted (in the Python `range()` tradition). Negative values are also accepted. A special value of `None` (the default) means removing just the row supplied in `start`.

__setitem__(key, value)

Set a row or a range of rows in the table.

It takes different actions depending on the type of the `key` parameter: if it is an integer, the corresponding table row is set to `value` (a record or sequence capable of being converted to the table structure). If the `key` is a slice, the row slice determined by it is set to `value` (a record array or sequence capable of being converted to the table structure).

Example of use:

```
# Modify just one existing row
table[2] = [456, 'db2', 1.2]
# Modify two existing rows
rows = numpy.rec.array([[457, 'db1', 1.2], [6, 'de2', 1.3]],
                       formats='i4,a3,f8')
table[1:3:2] = rows
```

Which is equivalent to:

```
table.modifyRows(start=2, rows=[456, 'db2', 1.2])
rows = numpy.rec.array([[457, 'db1', 1.2], [6, 'de2', 1.3]],
                       formats='i4,a3,f8')
table.modifyRows(start=1, stop=3, step=2, rows=rows)
```

See [Appendix C](#) if you are using `numarray` and you want to modify data in nested columns.

4.6.4. Table methods — querying

getWhereList(condition, condvars=None, sort=False, start=None, stop=None, step=None)

Get the row coordinates fulfilling the given condition.

The coordinates are returned as a list of the current flavor. `sort` means that you want to retrieve the coordinates ordered. The default is to not sort them.

The meaning of the other arguments is the same as in the `Table.where()` method (see [description](#)).

readWhere(condition, condvars=None, field=None, start=None, stop=None, step=None)

Read table data fulfilling the given *condition*.

This method is similar to `Table.read()` (see [description](#)), having their common arguments and return values the same meanings. However, only the rows fulfilling the *condition* are included in the result.

The meaning of the other arguments is the same as in the `Table.where()` method (see [description](#)).

where(condition, condvars=None, start=None, stop=None, step=None)

Iterate over values fulfilling a *condition*.

This method returns a Row iterator (see [Section 4.6.7](#)) which only selects rows in the table that satisfy the given *condition* (an expression-like string). For more information on condition syntax, see [Appendix B](#).

The `condvars` mapping may be used to define the variable names appearing in the *condition*. `condvars` should consist of identifier-like strings pointing to `Column` (see [Section 4.6.9](#)) instances *of this table*, or to other values (which will be converted to arrays). A default set of condition variables is provided where each top-level, non-nested column with an identifier-like name appears. Variables in `condvars` override the default ones.

When `condvars` is not provided or `None`, the current local and global namespace is sought instead of `condvars`. The previous mechanism is mostly intended for interactive usage. To disable it, just specify a (maybe empty) mapping as `condvars`.

If a range is supplied (by setting some of the `start`, `stop` or `step` parameters), only the rows in that range and fulfilling the *condition* are used. The meaning of the `start`, `stop` and `step` parameters is the same as in the `range()` Python function, except that negative values of `step` are not allowed. Moreover, if only `start` is specified, then `stop` will be set to `start+1`.

When possible, indexed columns participating in the condition will be used to speed up the search. It is recommended that you place the indexed columns as left and out in the condition as possible. Anyway, this method has always better performance than regular Python selections on the table. Please check the [Section 5.2](#) for more information about the performance of the different searching modes.



Note

Column indexing is only available in PyTables Pro.

You can mix this method with regular Python selections in order to support even more complex queries. It is strongly recommended that you pass the most restrictive condition as the parameter to this method if you want to achieve maximum performance.

Example of use:

```
>>> passvalues = [ row['col3'] for row in
...                 table.where('(col1 > 0) & (col2 <= 20)', step=5)
...                 if your_function(row['col2']) ]
>>> print "Values that pass the cuts:", passvalues
```

Note that, from PyTables 1.1 on, you can nest several iterators over the same table. For example:

```
for p in rout.where('pressure < 16'):
    for q in rout.where('pressure < 9'):
        for n in rout.where('energy < 10'):
            print "pressure, energy:", p['pressure'], n['energy']
```

In this example, iterators returned by `Table.where()` have been used, but you may as well use any of the other reading iterators that `Table` objects offer. See the file `examples/nested-iter.py` for the full code.



Warning

When in the middle of a table row iterator, you should not use methods that can change the number of rows in the table (like `Table.append()` or `Table.removeRows()`) or unexpected errors will happen.

whereAppend(dstTable, condition, condvars=None, start=None, stop=None, step=None)

Append rows fulfilling the `condition` to the `dstTable` table.

`dstTable` must be capable of taking the rows resulting from the query, i.e. it must have columns with the expected names and compatible types. The meaning of the other arguments is the same as in the `Table.where()` method (see [description](#)).

The number of rows appended to `dstTable` is returned as a result.

willQueryUseIndexing(condition, condvars=None)

Will a query for the `condition` use indexing?

The meaning of the `condition` and `condvars` arguments is the same as in the `Table.where()` method (see [description](#)). If the `condition` can use indexing, this method returns the path name of the column whose index is usable. Otherwise, it returns `None`.

This method is mainly intended for testing. Keep in mind that changing the set of indexed columns or their dirtyness may make this method return different values for the same arguments at different times.



Note

Column indexing is only available in PyTables Pro.

4.6.5. Table methods — other

flushRowsToIndex()

Add remaining rows in buffers to non-dirty indexes.

This can be useful when you have chosen non-automatic indexing for the table (see the `Table.autoIndex` property in [Section 4.6.1](#)) and you want to update the indexes on it.



Note

Column indexing is only available in PyTables Pro.

getEnum(colname)

Get the enumerated type associated with the named column.

If the column named `colname` (a string) exists and is of an enumerated type, the corresponding Enum instance (see [Section 4.14.3](#)) is returned. If it is not of an enumerated type, a `TypeError` is raised. If the column does not exist, a `KeyError` is raised.

reIndex()

Recompute all the existing indexes in the table.

This can be useful when you suspect that, for any reason, the index information for columns is no longer valid and want to rebuild the indexes on it.



Note

Column indexing is only available in PyTables Pro.

reIndexDirty()

Recompute the existing indexes in table, *if* they are dirty.

This can be useful when you have set `Table.autoIndex` (see [Section 4.6.1](#)) to false for the table and you want to update the indexes after an invalidating index operation (`Table.removeRows()`, for example).



Note

Column indexing is only available in PyTables Pro.

4.6.6. The Description class

This class represents descriptions of the structure of tables.

An instance of this class is automatically bound to `Table` (see [Section 4.6](#)) objects when they are created. It provides a browsable representation of the structure of the table, made of non-nested (`Col` —see [Section 4.13.2](#)) and nested (`Description`) columns. It also contains information that will allow you to build `NestedRecArray` (see [Appendix C](#)) objects suited for the different columns in a table (be they nested or not).

Column definitions under a description can be accessed as attributes of it (*natural naming*). For instance, if `table.description` is a `Description` instance with a column named `col1` under it, the later can be accessed as `table.description.col1`. If `col1` is nested and contains a `col2` column, this can be accessed as `table.description.col1.col2`. Because of natural naming, the names of members start with special prefixes, like in the `Group` class (see [Section 4.4](#)).

Description instance variables

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| <code>_v_colObjects</code> | A dictionary mapping the names of the columns hanging directly from the associated table or nested column to their respective descriptions (<code>Col</code> —see Section 4.13.2 — or <code>Description</code> —see Section 4.6.6 — instances). |
| <code>_v_dflts</code> | A dictionary mapping the names of non-nested columns hanging directly from the associated table or nested column to their respective default values. |
| <code>_v_dtype</code> | The NumPy type which reflects the structure of this table or nested column. You can use this as the <code>dtype</code> argument of NumPy array factories. |

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| <code>_v_dtypes</code> | A dictionary mapping the names of non-nested columns hanging directly from the associated table or nested column to their respective NumPy types. |
| <code>_v_is_nested</code> | Whether the associated table or nested column contains further nested columns or not. |
| <code>_v_itemsize</code> | The size in bytes of an item in this table or nested column. |
| <code>_v_name</code> | The name of this description group. The name of the root group is ' / '. |
| <code>_v_names</code> | A list of the names of the columns hanging directly from the associated table or nested column. The order of the names matches the order of their respective columns in the containing table. |
| <code>_v_nestedDescr</code> | A nested list of pairs of (name, format) tuples for all the columns under this table or nested column. You can use this as the dtype and descr arguments of NumPy array and NestedRecArray (see Appendix C) factories, respectively. |
| <code>_v_nestedFormats</code> | A nested list of the NumPy string formats (and shapes) of all the columns under this table or nested column. You can use this as the formats argument of NumPy array and NestedRecArray (see Appendix C) factories. |
| <code>_v_nestedlvl</code> | The level of the associated table or nested column in the nested datatype. |
| <code>_v_nestedNames</code> | A nested list of the names of all the columns under this table or nested column. You can use this as the names argument of NumPy array and NestedRecArray (see Appendix C) factories. |
| <code>_v_pathnames</code> | A list of the pathnames of all the columns under this table or nested column (in preorder). If it does not contain nested columns, this is exactly the same as the <code>Description._v_names</code> attribute. |
| <code>_v_types</code> | A dictionary mapping the names of non-nested columns hanging directly from the associated table or nested column to their respective PyTables types. |

Description methods

`_f_walk(type='All')`

Iterate over nested columns.

If type is 'All' (the default), all column description objects (Col and Description instances) are yielded in top-to-bottom order (preorder).

If type is 'Col' or 'Description', only column descriptions of that type are yielded.

4.6.7. The Row class

Table row iterator and field accessor.

Instances of this class are used to fetch and set the values of individual table fields. It works very much like a dictionary, where keys are the pathnames or positions (extended slicing is supported) of the fields in the associated table in a specific row.

This class provides an *iterator interface* so that you can use the same Row instance to access successive table rows one after the other. There are also some important methods that are useful for accessing, adding and modifying values in tables.

Row instance variables

nrow

The current row number.

This property is useful for knowing which row is being dealt with in the middle of a loop or iterator.

Row methods

append()

Add a new row of data to the end of the dataset.

Once you have filled the proper fields for the current row, calling this method actually appends the new data to the *output buffer* (which will eventually be dumped to disk). If you have not set the value of a field, the default value of the column will be used.

Example of use:

```
row = table.row
for i in xrange(nrows):
    row['col1'] = i-1
    row['col2'] = 'a'
    row['col3'] = -1.0
    row.append()
table.flush()
```



Warning

After completion of the loop in which `Row.append()` has been called, it is always convenient to make a call to `Table.flush()` in order to avoid losing the last rows that may still remain in internal buffers.

fetch_all_fields()

Retrieve all the fields in the current row.

Contrarily to `row[:]` (see [Section](#)), this returns row data as a NumPy void scalar. For instance:

```
[row.fetch_all_fields() for row in table.where('col1 < 3')]
```

will select all the rows that fulfill the given condition as a list of NumPy records.

update()

Change the data of the current row in the dataset.

This method allows you to modify values in a table when you are in the middle of a table iterator like `Table.iterrows()` (see [description](#)) or `Table.where()` (see [description](#)).

Once you have filled the proper fields for the current row, calling this method actually changes data in the *output buffer* (which will eventually be dumped to disk). If you have not set the value of a field, its original value will be used.

Examples of use:

```
for row in table.iterrows(step=10):
    row['col1'] = row.nrow
    row['col2'] = 'b'
```

```
row['col3'] = 0.0
row.update()
table.flush()
```

which modifies every tenth row in table. Or:

```
for row in table.where('col1 > 3'):
    row['col1'] = row.nrow
    row['col2'] = 'b'
    row['col3'] = 0.0
    row.update()
table.flush()
```

which just updates the rows with values bigger than 3 in the first column.



Warning

After completion of the loop in which `Row.update()` has been called, it is always convenient to make a call to `Table.flush()` in order to avoid losing changed rows that may still remain in internal buffers.

Row special methods

`__getitem__(key)`

Get the row field specified by the key.

The key can be a string (the name of the field), an integer (the position of the field) or a slice (the range of field positions). When key is a slice, the returned value is a *tuple* containing the values of the specified fields.

Examples of use:

```
res = [row['var3'] for row in table.where('var2 < 20')]
```

which selects the `var3` field for all the rows that fullfill the condition. Or:

```
res = [row[4] for row in table if row[1] < 20]
```

which selects the field in the *4th* position for all the rows that fullfill the condition. Or:

```
res = [row[:] for row in table if row['var2'] < 20]
```

which selects the all the fields (in the form of a *tuple*) for all the rows that fullfill the condition. Or:

```
res = [row[1::2] for row in table.iterrows(2, 3000, 3)]
```

which selects all the fields in even positions (in the form of a *tuple*) for all the rows in the slice `[2:3000:3]`.

`__setitem__(key, value)`

Set the key row field to the specified value.

Differently from its `__getitem__()` counterpart, in this case key can only be a string (the name of the field). The changes done via `__setitem__()` will not take effect on the data on disk until any of the `Row.append()` (see [description](#)) or `Row.update()` (see [description](#)) methods are called.

Example of use:

```
for row in table.iterrows(step=10):
```

```
row['col1'] = row.nrow
row['col2'] = 'b'
row['col3'] = 0.0
row.update()
table.flush()
```

which modifies every tenth row in the table.

4.6.8. The `Cols` class

Container for columns in a table or nested column.

This class is used as an *accessor* to the columns in a table or nested column. It supports the *natural naming* convention, so that you can access the different columns as attributes which lead to `Column` instances (for non-nested columns) or other `Cols` instances (for nested columns).

For instance, if `table.cols` is a `Cols` instance with a column named `col1` under it, the later can be accessed as `table.cols.col1`. If `col1` is nested and contains a `col2` column, this can be accessed as `table.cols.col1.col2` and so on. Because of natural naming, the names of members start with special prefixes, like in the `Group` class (see [Section 4.4](#)).

Like the `Column` class (see [Section 4.6.9](#)), `Cols` supports item access to read and write ranges of values in the table or nested column.

`Cols` instance variables

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| <code>_v_colnames</code> | A list of the names of the columns hanging directly from the associated table or nested column. The order of the names matches the order of their respective columns in the containing table. |
| <code>_v_colpathnames</code> | A list of the pathnames of all the columns under the associated table or nested column (in preorder). If it does not contain nested columns, this is exactly the same as the <code>Cols._v_colnames</code> attribute. |
| <code>_v_desc</code> | The associated <code>Description</code> instance (see Section 4.6.6). |
| <code>_v_table</code> | The parent <code>Table</code> instance (see Section 4.6). |

`Cols` methods

`_f_col(colname)`

Get an accessor to the column `colname`.

This method returns a `Column` instance (see [Section 4.6.9](#)) if the requested column is not nested, and a `Cols` instance (see [Section 4.6.8](#)) if it is. You may use full column pathnames in `colname`.

Calling `cols._f_col('col1/col2')` is equivalent to using `cols.col1.col2`. However, the first syntax is more intended for programmatic use. It is also better if you want to access columns with names that are not valid Python identifiers.

`__getitem__(key)`

Get a row or a range of rows from a table or nested column.

If the `key` argument is an integer, the corresponding nested type row is returned as a record of the current flavor. If `key` is a slice, the range of rows determined by it is returned as a record array of the current flavor.

Example of use:

```
record = table.cols[4] # equivalent to table[4]
recarray = table.cols.Info[4:1000:2]
```

Those statements are equivalent to:

```
nrecord = table.read(start=4)[0]
nrecarray = table.read(start=4, stop=1000, step=2).field('Info')
```

Here you can see how a mix of natural naming, indexing and slicing can be used as shorthands for the `Table.read()` (see [description](#)) method.

`__len__()`

Get the number of elements in the column.

This matches the length in rows of the parent table.

`__setitem__(key)`

Set a row or a range of rows in a table or nested column.

If the key argument is an integer, the corresponding row is set to value. If key is a slice, the range of rows determined by it is set to value.

Example of use:

```
table.cols[4] = record
table.cols.Info[4:1000:2] = recarray
```

Those statements are equivalent to:

```
table.modifyRows(4, rows=record)
table.modifyColumn(4, 1000, 2, colname='Info', column=recarray)
```

Here you can see how a mix of natural naming, indexing and slicing can be used as shorthands for the `Table.modifyRows()` (see [description](#)) and `Table.modifyColumn()` (see [description](#)) methods.

4.6.9. The `Column` class

Accessor for a non-nested column in a table.

Each instance of this class is associated with one *non-nested* column of a table. These instances are mainly used to read and write data from the table columns using item access (like the `Cols` class —see [Section 4.6.8](#)), but there are a few other associated methods to deal with indexes.



Note

Column indexing is only available in PyTables Pro.

`Column` instance variables

| | |
|--------------|--|
| descr | The <code>Description</code> (see Section 4.6.6) instance of the parent table or nested column. |
| dtype | The NumPy <code>dtype</code> that most closely matches this column. |

index The `Index` instance (see [Section 4.14.2](#)) associated with this column (`None` if the column is not indexed).



Note

Column indexing is only available in PyTables Pro.

is_indexed True if the column is indexed, false otherwise.



Note

Column indexing is only available in PyTables Pro.

name The name of the associated column.

pathname The complete pathname of the associated column (the same as `Column.name` if the column is not inside a nested column).

table The parent `Table` instance (see [Section 4.6](#)).

type The PyTables type of the column (a string).

Column methods

`createIndex(optlevel=6, filters=None)`

Create an index for this column.

You can select the optimization level of the index by setting `optlevel` from 0 (no optimization) to 9 (maximum optimization). Higher levels of optimization mean better chances for reducing the entropy of the index at the price of using more CPU and I/O resources for creating the index.

The `filters` argument can be used to set the `Filters` (see [Section 4.14.1](#)) used to compress the index. If `None`, default index filters will be used (currently, zlib level 1 with shuffling).

When `optlevel` is greater than 0, a temporary file is created during the index build process. You can use the `tmp_dir` argument to specify the directory for this temporary file. The default is to create it in the same directory as the file containing the original table.



Note

Column indexing is only available in PyTables Pro.

`reIndex()`

Recompute the index associated with this column.

This can be useful when you suspect that, for any reason, the index information is no longer valid and you want to rebuild it.

This method does nothing if the column is not indexed.



Note

Column indexing is only available in PyTables Pro.

reIndexDirty()

Recompute the associated index only if it is dirty.

This can be useful when you have set `Table.autoIndex` (see [Section 4.6.1](#)) to false for the table and you want to update the column's index after an invalidating index operation (like `Table.removeRows()` —see [description](#)).

This method does nothing if the column is not indexed.



Note

Column indexing is only available in PyTables Pro.

removeIndex()

Remove the index associated with this column.

This method does nothing if the column is not indexed. The removed index can be created again by calling the `Column.createIndex()` method (see [description](#)).



Note

Column indexing is only available in PyTables Pro.

Column special methods**__getitem__(key)**

Get a row or a range of rows from a column.

If the `key` argument is an integer, the corresponding element in the column is returned as an object of the current flavor. If `key` is a slice, the range of elements determined by it is returned as an array of the current flavor.

Example of use:

```
print "Column handlers:"
for name in table.colnames:
    print table.cols._f_col(name)

print "Select table.cols.name[1]-->", table.cols.name[1]
print "Select table.cols.name[1:2]-->", table.cols.name[1:2]
print "Select table.cols.name[:]-->", table.cols.name[:]
print "Select table.cols._f_col('name')[:]-->", table.cols._f_col('name')[:]
```

The output of this for a certain arbitrary table is:

```
Column handlers:
/table.cols.name (Column(), string, idx=None)
/table.cols.lati (Column(), int32, idx=None)
/table.cols.longi (Column(), int32, idx=None)
/table.cols.vector (Column(2,), int32, idx=None)
/table.cols.matrix2D (Column(2, 2), float64, idx=None)
Select table.cols.name[1]--> Particle:      11
Select table.cols.name[1:2]--> ['Particle:      11']
Select table.cols.name[:]--> ['Particle:      10'
```

```
'Particle:      11' 'Particle:      12'
'Particle:      13' 'Particle:      14']
Select table.cols._f_col('name')[:]-> ['Particle:      10'
'Particle:      11' 'Particle:      12'
'Particle:      13' 'Particle:      14']
```

See the `examples/table2.py` file for a more complete example.

`__len__()`

Get the number of elements in the column.

This matches the length in rows of the parent table.

`__setitem__(key, value)`

Set a row or a range of rows in a column.

If the `key` argument is an integer, the corresponding element is set to `value`. If `key` is a slice, the range of elements determined by it is set to `value`.

Example of use:

```
# Modify row 1
table.cols.col1[1] = -1
# Modify rows 1 and 3
table.cols.col1[1::2] = [2,3]
```

Which is equivalent to:

```
# Modify row 1
table.modifyColumns(start=1, columns=[[-1]], names=['col1'])
# Modify rows 1 and 3
columns = numpy.rec.fromarrays([[2,3]], formats='i4')
table.modifyColumns(start=1, step=2, columns=columns, names=['col1'])
```

4.7. The Array class

This class represents homogeneous datasets in an HDF5 file.

This class provides methods to write or read data to or from array objects in the file. This class does not allow you neither to enlarge nor compress the datasets on disk; use the `EArray` class (see [Section 4.9](#)) if you want enlargeable dataset support or compression features, or `CArray` (see [Section 4.8](#)) if you just want compression.

An interesting property of the `Array` class is that it remembers the *flavor* of the object that has been saved so that if you saved, for example, a `list`, you will get a `list` during readings afterwards; if you saved a NumPy array, you will get a NumPy object, and so forth.

Note that this class inherits all the public attributes and methods that `Leaf` (see [Section 4.5](#)) already provides. However, as `Array` instances have no internal I/O buffers, it is not necessary to use the `flush()` method they inherit from `Leaf` in order to save their internal state to disk. When a writing method call returns, all the data is already on disk.

4.7.1. Array instance variables

atom

An `Atom` (see [Section 4.13.3](#)) instance representing the *type* and *shape* of the atomic objects to be saved.

rowsize The size of the rows in dimensions orthogonal to *maindim*.

nrow On iterators, this is the index of the current row.

4.7.2. Array methods

getEnum()

Get the enumerated type associated with this array.

If this array is of an enumerated type, the corresponding Enum instance (see [Section 4.14.3](#)) is returned. If it is not of an enumerated type, a `TypeError` is raised.

iterrows(start=None, stop=None, step=None)

Iterate over the rows of the array.

This method returns an iterator yielding an object of the current flavor for each selected row in the array. The returned rows are taken from the *main dimension*.

If a range is not supplied, *all the rows* in the array are iterated upon—you can also use the `Array.__iter__()` special method (see [description](#)) for that purpose. If you only want to iterate over a given *range of rows* in the array, you may use the `start`, `stop` and `step` parameters, which have the same meaning as in `Array.read()` (see [description](#)).

Example of use:

```
result = [row for row in arrayInstance.iterrows(step=4)]
```

next()

Get the next element of the array during an iteration.

The element is returned as an object of the current flavor.

read(start=None, stop=None, step=None)

Get data in the array as an object of the current flavor.

The `start`, `stop` and `step` parameters can be used to select only a *range of rows* in the array. Their meanings are the same as in the built-in `range()` Python function, except that negative values of `step` are not allowed yet. Moreover, if only `start` is specified, then `stop` will be set to `start+1`. If you do not specify neither `start` nor `stop`, then *all the rows* in the array are selected.

4.7.3. Array special methods

The following methods automatically trigger actions when an `Array` instance is accessed in a special way (e.g. `array[2:3,...,:2]` will be equivalent to a call to `array.__getitem__((slice(2, 3, None), Ellipsis, slice(None, None, 2)))`).

__getitem__(key)

Get a row, a range of rows or a slice from the array.

The set of tokens allowed for the `key` is the same as that for extended slicing in Python (including the `Ellipsis` or `...` token). The result is an object of the current flavor; its shape depends on the kind of slice used as `key` and the shape of the array itself.

Example of use:

```
array1 = array[4] # array1.shape == array.shape[1:]
array2 = array[4:1000:2] # len(array2.shape) == len(array.shape)
array3 = array[:,2, 1:4, :]
array4 = array[1, ..., ::2, 1:4, 4:] # general slice selection
```

`__iter__()`

Iterate over the rows of the array.

This is equivalent to calling `Array.iterrows()` (see [description](#)) with default arguments, i.e. it iterates over *all the rows* in the array.

Example of use:

```
result = [row[2] for row in array]
```

Which is equivalent to:

```
result = [row[2] for row in array.iterrows()]
```

`__setitem__(key, value)`

Set a row, a range of rows or a slice in the array.

It takes different actions depending on the type of the `key` parameter: if it is an integer, the corresponding array row is set to `value` (the value is broadcast when needed). If the `key` is a slice, the row slice determined by it is set to `value` (as usual, if the slice to be updated exceeds the actual shape of the array, only the values in the existing range are updated).

If the `value` is a multidimensional object, then its shape must be compatible with the shape determined by the `key`, otherwise, a `ValueError` will be raised.

Example of use:

```
a1[0] = 333 # assign an integer to a Integer Array row
a2[0] = 'b' # assign a string to a string Array row
a3[1:4] = 5 # broadcast 5 to slice 1:4
a4[1:4:2] = 'xXx' # broadcast 'xXx' to slice 1:4:2
# General slice update (a5.shape = (4,3,2,8,5,10)).
a5[1, ..., ::2, 1:4, 4:] = arange(1728, shape=(4,3,2,4,3,6))
```

4.8. The CArray class

This class represents homogeneous datasets in an HDF5 file.

The difference between a `CArray` and a normal `Array` (see [Section 4.7](#)), from which it inherits, is that a `CArray` has a chunked layout and, as a consequence, it supports compression. You can use datasets of this class to easily save or load arrays to or from disk, with compression support included.

4.8.1. Example of use

See below a small example of the use of the `CArray` class. The code is available in `examples/carray1.py`:

```
import numpy
import tables
```

```

fileName = 'carray1.h5'
shape = (200, 300)
atom = tables.UInt8Atom()
filters = tables.Filters(complevel=5, complib='zlib')

h5f = tables.openFile(fileName, 'w')
ca = h5f.createCArray(h5f.root, 'carray', atom, shape, filters=filters)
# Fill a hyperslab in ``ca``.
ca[10:60, 20:70] = numpy.ones((50, 50))
h5f.close()

# Re-open and read another hyperslab
h5f = tables.openFile(fileName)
print h5f
print h5f.root.carray[8:12, 18:22]
h5f.close()

```

The output for the previous script is something like:

```

carray1.h5 (File) ''
Last modif.: 'Thu Apr 12 10:15:38 2007'
Object Tree:
/ (RootGroup) ''
/carray (CArray(200L, 300L), shuffle, zlib(5)) ''

[[0 0 0 0]
 [0 0 0 0]
 [0 0 1 1]
 [0 0 1 1]]

```

4.9. The EArray class

This class represents extendible, homogeneous datasets in an HDF5 file.

The main difference between an `ERArray` and a `CArray` (see [Section 4.8](#)), from which it inherits, is that the former can be enlarged along one of its dimensions, the *enlargeable dimension*. That means that the `Leaf.extdim` attribute (see [Section 4.5.1](#)) of any `ERArray` instance will always be non-negative. Multiple enlargeable dimensions might be supported in the future.

New rows can be added to the end of an enlargeable array by using the `ERArray.append()` method (see [the section called “append\(sequence\)”](#)). The array can also be shrunk along its enlargeable dimension using the `ERArray.truncate()` method (see [the section called “truncate\(size\)”](#)).

4.9.1. EArray methods

append(sequence)

Add a sequence of data to the end of the dataset.

The sequence must have the same type as the array; otherwise a `TypeError` is raised. In the same way, the dimensions of the sequence must conform to the shape of the array, that is, all dimensions must match, with the exception of the enlargeable dimension, which can be of any length (even 0!). If the shape of the sequence is invalid, a `ValueError` is raised.

truncate(size)

Truncate the extendable dimension to at most `size` rows.

Due to limitations of the underlying HDF5 implementation, `size` must be greater than 0 (i.e. the dataset can not be completely emptied).

4.9.2. Example of use

See below a small example of the use of the `EArray` class. The code is available in `examples/earray1.py`:

```
import tables
import numpy

fileh = tables.openFile('earray1.h5', mode='w')
a = tables.StringAtom(itemsize=8)
# Use ``a`` as the object type for the enlargeable array.
array_c = fileh.createEArray(fileh.root, 'array_c', a, (0,), "Chars")
array_c.append(numpy.array(['a'*2, 'b'*4], dtype='S8'))
array_c.append(numpy.array(['a'*6, 'b'*8, 'c'*10], dtype='S8'))

# Read the string ``EArray`` we have created on disk.
for s in array_c:
    print 'array_c[%s] => %r' % (array_c.nrow, s)
# Close the file.
fileh.close()
```

The output for the previous script is something like:

```
array_c[0] => 'aa'
array_c[1] => 'bbbb'
array_c[2] => 'aaaaaa'
array_c[3] => 'bbbbbbbb'
array_c[4] => 'cccccccc'
```

4.10. The `VArray` class

This class represents variable length (ragged) arrays in an HDF5 file.

Instances of this class represent array objects in the object tree with the property that their rows can have a *variable* number of homogeneous elements, called *atoms*. Like `Table` datasets (see [Section 4.6](#)), variable length arrays can have only one dimension, and the elements (atoms) of their rows can be fully multidimensional. `VArray` objects do also support compression.

When reading a range of rows from a `VArray`, you will *always* get a Python list of objects of the current flavor (each of them for a row), which may have different lengths.

This class provides methods to write or read data to or from variable length array objects in the file. Note that it also inherits all the public attributes and methods that `Leaf` (see [Section 4.5](#)) already provides.

4.10.1. `VArray` instance variables

atom An `Atom` (see [Section 4.13.3](#)) instance representing the *type* and *shape* of the atomic objects to be saved. You may use a *pseudo-atom* for storing a serialized object or variable length string per row.

flavor The type of data object read from this leaf.

Please note that when reading several rows of `VLArray` data, the flavor only applies to the *components* of the returned Python list, not to the list itself.

nrow On iterators, this is the index of the current row.

4.10.2. VLArray methods

append(sequence)

Add a *sequence* of data to the end of the dataset.

This method appends the objects in the *sequence* to a *single row* in this array. The type and shape of individual objects must be compliant with the atoms in the array. In the case of serialized objects and variable length strings, the object or string to append is itself the *sequence*.

getEnum()

Get the enumerated type associated with this array.

If this array is of an enumerated type, the corresponding Enum instance (see [Section 4.14.3](#)) is returned. If it is not of an enumerated type, a `TypeError` is raised.

iterrows(start=None, stop=None, step=None)

Iterate over the rows of the array.

This method returns an iterator yielding an object of the current flavor for each selected row in the array.

If a range is not supplied, *all the rows* in the array are iterated upon—you can also use the `VLArray.__iter__()` (see [description](#)) special method for that purpose. If you only want to iterate over a given *range of rows* in the array, you may use the *start*, *stop* and *step* parameters, which have the same meaning as in `VLArray.read()` (see [description](#)).

Example of use:

```
for row in vlarray.iterrows(step=4):
    print '%s[%d]-> %s' % (vlarray.name, vlarray.nrow, row)
```

next()

Get the next element of the array during an iteration.

The element is returned as a list of objects of the current flavor.

read(start=None, stop=None, step=1)

Get data in the array as a list of objects of the current flavor.

Please note that, as the lengths of the different rows are variable, the returned value is a *Python list* (not an array of the current flavor), with as many entries as specified rows in the range parameters.

The *start*, *stop* and *step* parameters can be used to select only a *range of rows* in the array. Their meanings are the same as in the built-in `range()` Python function, except that negative values of *step* are not allowed yet. Moreover, if only *start* is specified, then *stop* will be set to *start+1*. If you do not specify neither *start* nor *stop*, then *all the rows* in the array are selected.

4.10.3. VLArray special methods

The following methods automatically trigger actions when a VLArray instance is accessed in a special way (e.g., `vllarray[2:5]` will be equivalent to a call to `vllarray.__getitem__(slice(2, 5, None))`).

`__getitem__(key)`

Get a row or a range of rows from the array.

If the `key` argument is an integer, the corresponding array row is returned as an object of the current flavor. If `key` is a slice, the range of rows determined by it is returned as a list of objects of the current flavor.

Example of use:

```
a_row = vllarray[4]
a_list = vllarray[4:1000:2]
```

`__iter__()`

Iterate over the rows of the array.

This is equivalent to calling `VLArray.iterrows()` (see [description](#)) with default arguments, i.e. it iterates over *all the rows* in the array.

Example of use:

```
result = [row for row in vllarray]
```

Which is equivalent to:

```
result = [row for row in vllarray.iterrows()]
```

`__setitem__(keys, value)`

Set a row in the array.

It takes different actions depending on the type of the `key` parameter: if it is an integer, the corresponding array row is set to `value`. If the `key` is a tuple, the first element refers to the row to be modified, and the second element to the range within the row to be updated with the `value` (so it can be an integer or a slice).

The type and shape of the `value` must be compatible with the type and shape determined by the `key`, otherwise, a `TypeError` or a `ValueError` will be raised.



Note

When updating the rows of a VLArray object which uses a pseudo-atom, there is a problem: you can only update values with *exactly* the same size in bytes than the original row. This is very difficult to meet with object pseudo-atoms, because `cPickle` applied on a Python object does not guarantee to return the same number of bytes than over another object, even if they are of the same class. This effectively limits the kinds of objects than can be updated in variable-length arrays.

Example of use:

```
vllarray[0] = vllarray[0] * 2 + 3
vllarray[99, 3:] = arange(96) * 2 + 3
# Negative values for start and stop (but not step) are supported.
```

```
vlarray[99, -99:-89:2] = vlarray[5] * 2 + 3
```

4.10.4. Example of use

See below a small example of the use of the `VLArray` class. The code is available in `examples/vlarray1.py`:

```
import tables
from numpy import *

# Create a VLArray:
fileh = tables.openFile('vlarray1.h5', mode='w')
vlarray = fileh.createVLArray(fileh.root, 'vlarray1',
                              tables.Int32Atom(shape=()),
                              "ragged array of ints",
                              filters=tables.Filters(1))

# Append some (variable length) rows:
vlarray.append(array([5, 6]))
vlarray.append(array([5, 6, 7]))
vlarray.append([5, 6, 9, 8])

# Now, read it through an iterator:
print '-->', vlarray.title
for x in vlarray:
    print '%s[%d]--> %s' % (vlarray.name, vlarray.nrow, x)

# Now, do the same with native Python strings.
vlarray2 = fileh.createVLArray(fileh.root, 'vlarray2',
                               tables.StringAtom(itemsizes=2),
                               "ragged array of strings",
                               filters=tables.Filters(1))

vlarray2.flavor = 'python'
# Append some (variable length) rows:
print '-->', vlarray2.title
vlarray2.append(['5', '66'])
vlarray2.append(['5', '6', '77'])
vlarray2.append(['5', '6', '9', '88'])

# Now, read it through an iterator:
for x in vlarray2:
    print '%s[%d]--> %s' % (vlarray2.name, vlarray2.nrow, x)

# Close the file.
fileh.close()
```

The output for the previous script is something like:

```
--> ragged array of ints
vlarray1[0]--> [5 6]
vlarray1[1]--> [5 6 7]
vlarray1[2]--> [5 6 9 8]
--> ragged array of strings
vlarray2[0]--> ['5', '66']
vlarray2[1]--> ['5', '6', '77']
vlarray2[2]--> ['5', '6', '9', '88']
```

4.11. The `UnImplemented` class

This class represents datasets not supported by PyTables in an HDF5 file.

When reading a generic HDF5 file (i.e. one that has not been created with PyTables, but with some other HDF5 library based tool), chances are that the specific combination of datatypes or dataspace in some dataset might not be supported by PyTables yet. In such a case, this dataset will be mapped into an `UnImplemented` instance and the user will still be able to access the complete object tree of the generic HDF5 file. The user will also be able to *read and write the attributes* of the dataset, *access some of its metadata*, and perform *certain hierarchy manipulation operations* like deleting or moving (but not copying) the node. Of course, the user will not be able to read the actual data on it.

This is an elegant way to allow users to work with generic HDF5 files despite the fact that some of its datasets are not supported by PyTables. However, if you are really interested in having full access to an unimplemented dataset, please get in contact with the developer team.

This class does not have any public instance variables or methods, except those inherited from the `Leaf` class (see [Section 4.5](#)).

4.12. The `AttributeSet` class

Container for the HDF5 attributes of a `Node` (see [Section 4.3](#)).

This class provides methods to create new HDF5 node attributes, and to get, rename or delete existing ones.

Like in `Group` instances (see [Section 4.4](#)), `AttributeSet` instances make use of the *natural naming* convention, i.e. you can access the attributes on disk as if they were normal Python attributes of the `AttributeSet` instance.

This offers the user a very convenient way to access HDF5 node attributes. However, for this reason and in order not to pollute the object namespace, one can not assign *normal* attributes to `AttributeSet` instances, and their members use names which start by special prefixes as happens with `Group` objects.

4.12.1. Notes on native and pickled attributes

The values of most basic types are saved as HDF5 native data in the HDF5 file. This includes Python `bool`, `int`, `float`, `complex` and `str` (but not `long` nor `unicode`) values, as well as their NumPy scalar versions and *homogeneous* NumPy arrays of them. When read, these values are always loaded as NumPy scalar or array objects, as needed.

For that reason, attributes in native HDF5 files will be always mapped into NumPy objects. Specifically, a multidimensional attribute will be mapped into a multidimensional `ndarray` and a scalar will be mapped into a NumPy scalar object (for example, a scalar `H5T_NATIVE_LLONG` will be read and returned as a `numpy.int64` scalar).

However, other kinds of values are serialized using `cPickle`, so you only will be able to correctly retrieve them using a Python-aware HDF5 library. Thus, if you want to save Python scalar values and make sure you are able to read them with generic HDF5 tools, you should make use of *scalar or homogeneous array NumPy objects* (for example, `numpy.int64(1)` or `numpy.array([1, 2, 3], dtype='int16')`).

One more piece of advice: because of the various potential difficulties in restoring a Python object stored in an attribute, you may end up getting a `cPickle` string where a Python object is expected. If this is the case, you may wish to run `cPickle.loads()` on that string to get an idea of where things went wrong, as shown in this example:

```
>>> import os, tempfile
>>> import tables
>>>
```

```

>>> class MyClass(object):
...     foo = 'bar'
...
>>> myObject = MyClass() # save object of custom class in HDF5 attr
>>> h5fname = tempfile.mktemp(suffix='.h5')
>>> h5f = tables.openFile(h5fname, 'w')
>>> h5f.root._v_attrs.obj = myObject # store the object
>>> print h5f.root._v_attrs.obj.foo # retrieve it
bar
>>> h5f.close()
>>>
>>> del MyClass, myObject # delete class of object and reopen file
>>> h5f = tables.openFile(h5fname, 'r')
>>> print repr(h5f.root._v_attrs.obj)
'ccopy_reg\n_reconstructor...'
>>> import cPickle # let's unpickle that to see what went wrong
>>> cPickle.loads(h5f.root._v_attrs.obj)
Traceback (most recent call last):
...
AttributeError: 'module' object has no attribute 'MyClass'
>>> # So the problem was not in the stored object,
... # but in the *environment* where it was restored.
... h5f.close()
>>> os.remove(h5fname)

```

4.12.2. AttributeSet instance variables

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| <code>_v_attrnames</code> | A list with all attribute names. |
| <code>_v_attrnamesys</code> | A list with system attribute names. |
| <code>_v_attrnamesuser</code> | A list with user attribute names. |
| <code>_v_node</code> | The Node instance (see Section 4.3) this attribute set is associated with. |

4.12.3. AttributeSet methods

Note that this class overrides the `__setattr__()`, `__getattr__()` and `__delattr__()` special methods. This allows you to read, assign or delete attributes on disk by just using the next constructs:

```

leaf.attrs.myattr = 'str attr' # set a string (native support)
leaf.attrs.myattr2 = 3         # set an integer (native support)
leaf.attrs.myattr3 = [3, (1, 2)] # a generic object (Pickled)
attrib = leaf.attrs.myattr      # get the attribute ``myattr``
del leaf.attrs.myattr           # delete the attribute ``myattr``

```

If an attribute is set on a target node that already has a large number of attributes, a `PerformanceWarning` will be issued.

`_f_copy(where)`

Copy attributes to the where node.

Copies all user and certain system attributes to the given where node (a Node instance —see [Section 4.3](#)), replacing the existing ones.

`_f_list(attrset='user')`

Get a list of attribute names.

The `attrset` string selects the attribute set to be used. A `'user'` value returns only user attributes (this is the default). A `'sys'` value returns only system attributes. Finally, `'all'` returns both system and user attributes.

`_f_rename(oldattrname, newattrname)`

Rename an attribute from `oldattrname` to `newattrname`.

`__contains__(name)`

Is there an attribute with that name?

A true value is returned if the attribute set has an attribute with the given name, false otherwise.

4.13. Declarative classes

In this section a series of classes that are meant to *declare* datatypes that are required for primary PyTables datasets (like `Table` or `VLArray`) are described.

4.13.1. The `IsDescription` class

Description of the structure of a table or nested column.

This class is designed to be used as an easy, yet meaningful way to describe the structure of new `Table` (see [Section 4.6](#)) datasets or nested columns through the definition of *derived classes*. In order to define such a class, you must declare it as descendant of `IsDescription`, with as many attributes as columns you want in your table. The name of each attribute will become the name of a column, and its value will hold a description of it.

Ordinary columns can be described using instances of the `Col` class (see [Section 4.13.2](#)). Nested columns can be described by using classes derived from `IsDescription`, instances of it, or name-description dictionaries. Derived classes can be declared in place (in which case the column takes the name of the class) or referenced by name.

Nested columns can have a `_v_pos` special attribute which sets the *relative* position of the column among sibling columns *also having explicit positions*. The `pos` constructor argument of `Col` instances is used for the same purpose. Columns with no explicit position will be placed afterwards in alphanumeric order.

Once you have created a description object, you can pass it to the `Table` constructor, where all the information it contains will be used to define the table structure. See the [Section 3.4](#) for an example on how that works.

`IsDescription` special attributes

These are the special attributes that the user can specify *when declaring* an `IsDescription` subclass to complement its *metadata*.

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| <code>_v_pos</code> | Sets the position of a possible nested column description among its sibling columns. |
|---------------------|--|

`IsDescription` class variables

The following attributes are *automatically created* when an `IsDescription` subclass is declared. Please note that declared columns can no longer be accessed as normal class variables after its creation.

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| <code>columns</code> | Maps the name of each column in the description to its own descriptive object. |
|-----------------------------|--|

4.13.2. The `Col` class and its descendants

Defines a non-nested column.

`Col` instances are used as a means to declare the different properties of a non-nested column in a table or nested column. `Col` classes are descendants of their equivalent `Atom` classes (see [Section 4.13.3](#)), but their instances have an additional `_v_pos` attribute that is used to decide the position of the column inside its parent table or nested column (see the `IsDescription` class in [Section 4.13.1](#) for more information on column positions).

In the same fashion as `Atom`, you should use a particular `Col` descendant class whenever you know the exact type you will need when writing your code. Otherwise, you may use one of the `Col.from_*()` factory methods.

`Col` instance variables

In addition to the variables that they inherit from the `Atom` class, `Col` instances have the following attributes:

`_v_pos` The *relative* position of this column with regard to its column siblings.

`Col` factory methods

`from_atom(atom, pos=None)`

Create a `Col` definition from a PyTables `atom`.

An optional position may be specified as the `pos` argument.

`from_dtype(dtype, dflt=None, pos=None)`

Create a `Col` definition from a NumPy `dtype`.

Optional default value and position may be specified as the `dflt` and `pos` arguments, respectively. Information in the `dtype` not represented in a `Col` is ignored.

`from_kind(kind, itemsize=None, shape=(), dflt=None, pos=None)`

Create a `Col` definition from a PyTables `kind`.

Optional item size, shape, default value and position may be specified as the `itemsize`, `shape`, `dflt` and `pos` arguments, respectively. Bear in mind that not all columns support a default item size.

`from_sctype(sctype, shape=(), dflt=None, pos=None)`

Create a `Col` definition from a NumPy scalar type `sctype`.

Optional shape, default value and position may be specified as the `shape`, `dflt` and `pos` arguments, respectively. Information in the `sctype` not represented in a `Col` is ignored.

`from_type(type, shape=(), dflt=None, pos=None)`

Create a `Col` definition from a PyTables `type`.

Optional shape, default value and position may be specified as the `shape`, `dflt` and `pos` arguments, respectively.

`Col` constructors

For each `TYPEAtom` class there is a matching `TYPECol` class with the same constructor signature, plus an additional `pos` parameter, which defaults to `None` and may take an integer. This argument is used to set the `_v_pos` attribute.

4.13.3. The `Atom` class and its descendants.

Defines the type of atomic cells stored in a dataset.

The meaning of *atomic* is that individual elements of a cell can not be extracted directly by indexing (i.e. `__getitem__()`) the dataset; e.g. if a dataset has shape (2, 2) and its atoms have shape (3,), to get the third element of the cell at (1, 0) one should use `dataset[1, 0][2]` instead of `dataset[1, 0, 2]`.

The `Atom` class is meant to declare the different properties of the *base element* (also known as *atom*) of `CArray`, `EArray` and `VArray` datasets, although they are also used to describe the base elements of `Array` datasets. Atoms have the property that their length is always the same. However, you can grow datasets along the extensible dimension in the case of `EArray` or put a variable number of them on a `VArray` row. Moreover, they are not restricted to scalar values, and they can be *fully multidimensional objects*.

A series of descendant classes are offered in order to make the use of these element descriptions easier. You should use a particular `Atom` descendant class whenever you know the exact type you will need when writing your code. Otherwise, you may use one of the `Atom.from_*` factory methods.

`Atom` instance variables

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| <code>dflt</code> | The default value of the atom. If the user does not supply a value for an element while filling a dataset, this default value will be written to disk. If the user supplies a scalar value for a multidimensional atom, this value is automatically <i>broadcast</i> to all the items in the atom cell. If <code>dflt</code> is not supplied, an appropriate zero value (or <i>null</i> string) will be chosen by default. Please note that default values are kept internally as NumPy objects. |
| <code>dtype</code> | The NumPy <code>dtype</code> that most closely matches this atom. |
| <code>itemsizes</code> | Size in bytes of a single item in the atom. Specially useful for atoms of the <code>string</code> kind. |
| <code>kind</code> | The PyTables kind of the atom (a string). For a relation of the data kinds supported by PyTables and more information about them, see Appendix A . |
| <code>recarrtype</code> | String type to be used in <code>numpy.rec.array()</code> . |
| <code>shape</code> | The shape of the atom (a tuple, <code>()</code> for scalar atoms). |
| <code>size</code> | Total size in bytes of the atom. |
| <code>type</code> | The PyTables type of the atom (a string). For a relation of the data types supported by PyTables and more information about them, see Appendix A . |

Atoms can be compared with atoms and other objects for strict (in)equality without having to compare individual attributes:

```
>>> atom1 = StringAtom(itemsizes=10) # same as ``atom2``
>>> atom2 = Atom.from_kind('string', 10) # same as ``atom1``
>>> atom3 = IntAtom()
>>> atom1 == 'foo'
False
>>> atom1 == atom2
```

```
True
>>> atom2 != atom1
False
>>> atom1 == atom3
False
>>> atom3 != atom2
True
```

Atom methods

copy(override)**

Get a copy of the atom, possibly overriding some arguments.

Constructor arguments to be overridden must be passed as keyword arguments.

```
>>> atom1 = StringAtom(itemsizes=12)
>>> atom2 = atom1.copy()
>>> print atom1
StringAtom(itemsizes=12, shape=(), dflt='')
>>> print atom2
StringAtom(itemsizes=12, shape=(), dflt='')
>>> atom1 is atom2
False
>>> atom3 = atom1.copy(itemsizes=100, shape=(2, 2))
>>> print atom3
StringAtom(itemsizes=100, shape=(2, 2), dflt='')
>>> atom1.copy(foobar=42)
Traceback (most recent call last):
...
TypeError: __init__() got an unexpected keyword argument 'foobar'
```

Atom factory methods

from_dtype(dtype, dflt=None)

Create an Atom from a NumPy dtype.

An optional default value may be specified as the `dflt` argument. Information in the dtype not represented in an Atom is ignored.

```
>>> import numpy
>>> Atom.from_dtype(numpy.dtype((numpy.int16, (2, 2))))
Int16Atom(shape=(2, 2), dflt=0)
>>> Atom.from_dtype(numpy.dtype('S5'), dflt='hello')
StringAtom(itemsizes=5, shape=(), dflt='hello')
>>> Atom.from_dtype(numpy.dtype('Float64'))
Float64Atom(shape=(), dflt=0.0)
```

from_kind(kind, itemsizes=None, shape=(), dflt=None)

Create an Atom from a PyTables kind.

Optional item size, shape and default value may be specified as the `itemsizes`, `shape` and `dflt` arguments, respectively. Bear in mind that not all atoms support a default item size.


```
>>> Atom.from_kind('int', itemsize=2, shape=(2, 2))
Int16Atom(shape=(2, 2), dflt=0)
>>> Atom.from_kind('int', shape=(2, 2))
Int32Atom(shape=(2, 2), dflt=0)
>>> Atom.from_kind('string', itemsize=5, dflt='hello')
StringAtom(itemsize=5, shape=(), dflt='hello')
>>> Atom.from_kind('string', dflt='hello')
Traceback (most recent call last):
...
ValueError: no default item size for kind ``string``
>>> Atom.from_kind('Float')
Traceback (most recent call last):
...
ValueError: unknown kind: 'Float'
```

Moreover, some kinds with atypical constructor signatures are not supported; you need to use the proper constructor:

```
>>> Atom.from_kind('enum')
Traceback (most recent call last):
...
ValueError: the ``enum`` kind is not supported...
```

from_sctype(sctype, shape=(), dflt=None)

Create an Atom from a NumPy scalar type `sctype`.

Optional shape and default value may be specified as the `shape` and `dflt` arguments, respectively. Information in the `sctype` not represented in an Atom is ignored.

```
>>> import numpy
>>> Atom.from_sctype(numpy.int16, shape=(2, 2))
Int16Atom(shape=(2, 2), dflt=0)
>>> Atom.from_sctype('S5', dflt='hello')
Traceback (most recent call last):
...
ValueError: unknown NumPy scalar type: 'S5'
>>> Atom.from_sctype('Float64')
Float64Atom(shape=(), dflt=0.0)
```

from_type(type, shape=(), dflt=None)

Create an Atom from a PyTables type.

Optional shape and default value may be specified as the `shape` and `dflt` arguments, respectively.

```
>>> Atom.from_type('bool')
BoolAtom(shape=(), dflt=False)
>>> Atom.from_type('int16', shape=(2, 2))
Int16Atom(shape=(2, 2), dflt=0)
>>> Atom.from_type('string40', dflt='hello')
Traceback (most recent call last):
...
ValueError: unknown type: 'string40'
>>> Atom.from_type('Float64')
Traceback (most recent call last):
...
```

```
ValueError: unknown type: 'Float64'
```

Atom constructors

There are some common arguments for most Atom-derived constructors:

itemsize

For types with a non-fixed size, this sets the size in bytes of individual items in the atom.

shape

Sets the shape of the atom. An integer shape like 2 is equivalent to the tuple (2 ,).

dflt

Sets the default value for the atom.

A relation of the different constructors with their parameters follows.

StringAtom(itemsize, shape=(), dflt="")

Defines an atom of type `string`.

The item size is the *maximum* length in characters of strings.

BoolAtom(shape=(), dflt=False)

Defines an atom of type `bool`.

IntAtom(itemsize=4, shape=(), dflt=0)

Defines an atom of a signed integral type (`int` kind).

Int8Atom(shape=(), dflt=0)

Defines an atom of type `int8`.

Int16Atom(shape=(), dflt=0)

Defines an atom of type `int16`.

Int32Atom(shape=(), dflt=0)

Defines an atom of type `int32`.

Int64Atom(shape=(), dflt=0)

Defines an atom of type `int64`.

UIntAtom(itemsize=4, shape=(), dflt=0)

Defines an atom of an unsigned integral type (`uint` kind).

UInt8Atom(shape=(), dflt=0)

Defines an atom of type `uint8`.

UInt16Atom(shape=(), dflt=0)

Defines an atom of type `uint16`.

UInt32Atom(shape=(), dflt=0)

Defines an atom of type `uint32`.

UInt64Atom(shape=(), dflt=0)

Defines an atom of type `uint64`.

Float32Atom(shape=(), dflt=0.0)

Defines an atom of type `float32`.

Float64Atom(shape=(), dflt=0.0)

Defines an atom of type `float64`.

ComplexAtom(itemsize, shape=(), dflt=0j)

Defines an atom of kind `complex`.

Allowed item sizes are 8 (single precision) and 16 (double precision). This class must be used instead of more concrete ones to avoid confusions with `numarray`-like precision specifications used in PyTables 1.X.

TimeAtom(itemsize=4, shape=(), dflt=0)

Defines an atom of time type (`time` kind).

There are two distinct supported types of time: a 32 bit integer value and a 64 bit floating point value. Both of them reflect the number of seconds since the Unix epoch. This atom has the property of being stored using the HDF5 time datatypes.

Time32Atom(shape=(), dflt=0)

Defines an atom of type `time32`.

Time64Atom(shape=(), dflt=0.0)

Defines an atom of type `time64`.

EnumAtom(enum, dflt, base, shape=())

Description of an atom of an enumerated type.

Instances of this class describe the atom type used to store enumerated values. Those values belong to an enumerated type, defined by the first argument (`enum`) in the constructor of the atom, which accepts the same kinds of arguments as the `Enum` class (see [Section 4.14.3](#)). The enumerated type is stored in the `enum` attribute of the atom.

A default value must be specified as the second argument (`dflt`) in the constructor; it must be the *name* (a string) of one of the enumerated values in the enumerated type. When the atom is created, the corresponding concrete value is broadcast and stored in the `dflt` attribute (setting different default values for items in a multidimensional atom is not supported yet). If the name does not match any value in the enumerated type, a `KeyError` is raised.

Another atom must be specified as the `base` argument in order to determine the base type used for storing the values of enumerated values in memory and disk. This *storage atom* is kept in the `base` attribute of the created atom. As a shorthand, you may specify a PyTables type instead of the storage atom, implying that this has a scalar shape.

The storage atom should be able to represent each and every concrete value in the enumeration. If it is not, a `TypeError` is raised. The default value of the storage atom is ignored.

The type attribute of enumerated atoms is always `enum`.

Enumerated atoms also support comparisons with other objects:

```
>>> enum = ['T0', 'T1', 'T2']
>>> atom1 = EnumAtom(enum, 'T0', 'int8') # same as ``atom2``
>>> atom2 = EnumAtom(enum, 'T0', Int8Atom()) # same as ``atom1``
>>> atom3 = EnumAtom(enum, 'T0', 'int16')
>>> atom4 = Int8Atom()
>>> atom1 == enum
False
>>> atom1 == atom2
True
>>> atom2 != atom1
False
>>> atom1 == atom3
False
>>> atom1 == atom4
False
>>> atom4 != atom1
True
```

Examples

The next C enum construction:

```
enum myEnum {
    T0,
    T1,
    T2
};
```

would correspond to the following PyTables declaration:

```
>>> myEnumAtom = EnumAtom(['T0', 'T1', 'T2'], 'T0', 'int32')
```

Please note the `dfmt` argument with a value of `'T0'`. Since the concrete value matching `T0` is unknown right now (we have not used explicit concrete values), using the name is the only option left for defining a default value for the atom.

The chosen representation of values for this enumerated atom uses unsigned 32-bit integers, which surely wastes quite a lot of memory. Another size could be selected by using the `base` argument (this time with a full-blown storage atom):

```
>>> myEnumAtom = EnumAtom(['T0', 'T1', 'T2'], 'T0', UInt8Atom())
```

You can also define multidimensional arrays for data elements:

```
>>> myEnumAtom = EnumAtom(
...     ['T0', 'T1', 'T2'], 'T0', base='uint32', shape=(3,2))
```

for 3x2 arrays of `uint32`.

Pseudo atoms

Now, there come three special classes, `ObjectAtom`, `VLStringAtom` and `VLUnicodeAtom`, that actually do not descend from `Atom`, but which goal is so similar that they should be described here. Pseudo-atoms can only be used with `VLArray` datasets (see [Section 4.10](#)), and they do not support multidimensional values, nor multiple values per row.

They can be recognised because they also have `kind`, `type` and `shape` attributes, but no `size`, `itemsize` or `dtype` ones. Instead, they have a `base atom` which defines the elements used for storage.

See `examples/vlarray1.py` and `examples/vlarray2.py` for further examples on `VArray` datasets, including object serialization and string management.

ObjectAtom()

Defines an atom of type `object`.

This class is meant to fit *any* kind of Python object in a row of a `VArray` dataset by using `cPickle` behind the scenes. Due to the fact that you can not foresee how long will be the output of the `cPickle` serialization (i.e. the atom already has a *variable* length), you can only fit *one object per row*. However, you can still group several objects in a single tuple or list and pass it to the `VArray.append()` method (see [description](#)).

Object atoms do not accept parameters and they cause the reads of rows to always return Python objects. You can regard `object` atoms as an easy way to save an arbitrary number of generic Python objects in a `VArray` dataset.

VLStringAtom()

Defines an atom of type `vlstring`.

This class describes a *row* of the `VArray` class, rather than an atom. It differs from the `StringAtom` class in that you can only add *one instance of it to one specific row*, i.e. the `VArray.append()` method (see [description](#)) only accepts one object when the base atom is of this type.

Like `StringAtom`, this class does not make assumptions on the encoding of the string, and raw bytes are stored as is. Unicode strings are supported as long as no character is out of the ASCII set; otherwise, you will need to *explicitly* convert them to strings before you can save them. For full Unicode support, using `VLUnicodeAtom` (see [description](#)) is recommended.

Variable-length string atoms do not accept parameters and they cause the reads of rows to always return Python strings. You can regard `vlstring` atoms as an easy way to save generic variable length strings.

VLUnicodeAtom()

Defines an atom of type `vlunicode`.

This class describes a *row* of the `VArray` class, rather than an atom. It is very similar to `VLStringAtom` (see [description](#)), but it stores Unicode strings (using 32-bit characters a la UCS-4, so all strings of the same length also take up the same space).

This class does not make assumptions on the encoding of plain input strings. Plain strings are supported as long as no character is out of the ASCII set; otherwise, you will need to *explicitly* convert them to Unicode before you can save them.

Variable-length Unicode atoms do not accept parameters and they cause the reads of rows to always return Python Unicode strings. You can regard `vlunicode` atoms as an easy way to save variable length Unicode strings.

4.14. Helper classes

This section describes some classes that do not fit in any other section and that mainly serve for ancillary purposes.

4.14.1. The `Filters` class

Container for filter properties.

This class is meant to serve as a container that keeps information about the filter properties associated with the chunked leaves, that is `Table`, `CArray`, `EArray` and `VArray`.

Instances of this class can be directly compared for equality.

Filters instance variables

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| fletcher32 | Whether the <i>Fletcher32</i> filter is active or not. |
| complevel | The compression level (0 disables compression). |
| complib | The compression filter used (irrelevant when compression is not enabled). |
| shuffle | Whether the <i>Shuffle</i> filter is active or not. |

Example of use

This is a small example on using the `Filters` class:

```
import numpy
from tables import *

fileh = openFile('test5.h5', mode='w')
atom = Float32Atom()
filters = Filters(complevel=1, complib='lzo', fletcher32=True)
arr = fileh.createEArray(fileh.root, 'earray', atom, (0,2),
                        "A growable array", filters=filters)
# Append several rows in only one call
arr.append(numpy.array([[1., 2.],
                        [2., 3.],
                        [3., 4.]], dtype=numpy.float32))

# Print information on that enlargeable array
print "Result Array:"
print repr(arr)

fileh.close()
```

This enforces the use of the LZO library, a compression level of 1 and a Fletcher32 checksum filter as well. See the output of this example:

```
Result Array:
/earray (EArray(3L, 2), fletcher32, shuffle, lzo(1)) 'A growable array'
  type = float32
  shape = (3L, 2)
  itemsize = 4
  nrows = 3
  extdim = 0
  flavor = 'numpy'
  byteorder = 'little'
```

`Filters(complevel=0, complib='zlib', shuffle=True, fletcher32=False)`

Create a new `Filters` instance.

complevel

Specifies a compression level for data. The allowed range is 0-9. A value of 0 (the default) disables compression.

complib

Specifies the compression library to be used. Right now, 'zlib' (the default), 'lzo' and 'bzip2' are supported. Specifying a compression library which is not available in the system issues a `FiltersWarning` and sets the library to the default one.

See [Section 5.3](#) for some advice on which library is better suited to your needs.

shuffle

Whether or not to use the *Shuffle* filter in the HDF5 library. This is normally used to improve the compression ratio. A false value disables shuffling and a true one enables it. The default value depends on whether compression is enabled or not; if compression is enabled, shuffling defaults to be enabled, else shuffling is disabled. Shuffling can only be used when compression is enabled.

fletcher32

Whether or not to use the *Fletcher32* filter in the HDF5 library. This is used to add a checksum on each data chunk. A false value (the default) disables the checksum.

copy(override)

Get a copy of the filters, possibly overriding some arguments.

Constructor arguments to be overridden must be passed as keyword arguments.

Using this method is recommended over replacing the attributes of an instance, since instances of this class may become immutable in the future.

```
>>> filters1 = Filters()
>>> filters2 = filters1.copy()
>>> filters1 == filters2
True
>>> filters1 is filters2
False
>>> filters3 = filters1.copy(complevel=1)
Traceback (most recent call last):
...
ValueError: compression library ``None`` is not supported...
>>> filters3 = filters1.copy(complevel=1, complib='zlib')
>>> print filters1
Filters(complevel=0, shuffle=False, fletcher32=False)
>>> print filters3
Filters(complevel=1, complib='zlib', shuffle=False, fletcher32=False)
>>> filters1.copy(foobar=42)
Traceback (most recent call last):
...
TypeError: __init__() got an unexpected keyword argument 'foobar'
```

4.14.2. The Index class

Represents the index of a column in a table.

This class is used to keep the indexing information for columns in a `Table` dataset (see [Section 4.6](#)). It is actually a descendant of the `Group` class (see [Section 4.4](#)), with some added functionality. An `Index` is always associated with one and only one column in the table.

This class is mainly intended for internal use, but some of its attributes may be interesting for the programmer.

Index instance variables

| | |
|------------------|--|
| column | The Column (see Section 4.6.9) instance for the indexed column. |
| dirty | Whether the index is dirty or not. Dirty indexes are out of sync with column data, so they exist but they are not usable. |
| filters | Filter properties for this index —see <code>Filters</code> in Section 4.14.1 . |
| nelements | The number of currently indexed row for this column. |

4.14.3. The Enum class

Enumerated type.

Each instance of this class represents an enumerated type. The values of the type must be declared *exhaustively* and named with *strings*, and they might be given explicit concrete values, though this is not compulsory. Once the type is defined, it can not be modified.

There are three ways of defining an enumerated type. Each one of them corresponds to the type of the only argument in the constructor of Enum:

- *Sequence of names*: each enumerated value is named using a string, and its order is determined by its position in the sequence; the concrete value is assigned automatically:

```
>>> boolEnum = Enum(['True', 'False'])
```

- *Mapping of names*: each enumerated value is named by a string and given an explicit concrete value. All of the concrete values must be different, or a `ValueError` will be raised.

```
>>> priority = Enum({'red': 20, 'orange': 10, 'green': 0})
>>> colors = Enum({'red': 1, 'blue': 1})
Traceback (most recent call last):
...
ValueError: enumerated values contain duplicate concrete values: 1
```

- *Enumerated type*: in that case, a copy of the original enumerated type is created. Both enumerated types are considered equal.

```
>>> prio2 = Enum(priority)
>>> priority == prio2
True
```

Please note that names starting with `_` are not allowed, since they are reserved for internal usage:

```
>>> prio2 = Enum(['_xx'])
Traceback (most recent call last):
...
ValueError: name of enumerated value can not start with ``_``: '_xx'
```

The concrete value of an enumerated value is obtained by getting its name as an attribute of the Enum instance (see `__getattr__()`) or as an item (see `__getitem__()`). This allows comparisons between enumerated values and assigning them to ordinary Python variables:


```
>>> redv = priority.red
>>> redv == priority['red']
True
>>> redv > priority.green
True
>>> priority.red == priority.orange
False
```

The name of the enumerated value corresponding to a concrete value can also be obtained by using the `__call__()` method of the enumerated type. In this way you get the symbolic name to use it later with `__getitem__()`:

```
>>> priority(redv)
'red'
>>> priority.red == priority[priority(priority.red)]
True
```

(If you ask, the `__getitem__()` method is not used for this purpose to avoid ambiguity in the case of using strings as concrete values.)

Enum special methods

`__call__(value, *default)`

Get the name of the enumerated value with that concrete value.

If there is no value with that concrete value in the enumeration and a second argument is given as a `default`, this is returned. Else, a `ValueError` is raised.

This method can be used for checking that a concrete value belongs to the set of concrete values in an enumerated type.

`__contains__(name)`

Is there an enumerated value with that name in the type?

If the enumerated type has an enumerated value with that name, `True` is returned. Otherwise, `False` is returned. The name must be a string.

This method does *not* check for concrete values matching a value in an enumerated type. For that, please use the `Enum.__call__()` method (see [description](#)).

`__eq__(other)`

Is the `other` enumerated type equivalent to this one?

Two enumerated types are equivalent if they have exactly the same enumerated values (i.e. with the same names and concrete values).

`__getattr__(name)`

Get the concrete value of the enumerated value with that name.

The name of the enumerated value must be a string. If there is no value with that name in the enumeration, an `AttributeError` is raised.

`__getitem__(name)`

Get the concrete value of the enumerated value with that name.

The name of the enumerated value must be a string. If there is no value with that name in the enumeration, a `KeyError` is raised.

`__iter__()`

Iterate over the enumerated values.

Enumerated values are returned as `(name, value)` pairs *in no particular order*.

`__len__()`

Return the number of enumerated values in the enumerated type.

`__repr__()`

Return the canonical string representation of the enumeration. The output of this method can be evaluated to give a new enumeration object that will compare equal to this one.

Chapter 5. Optimization tips

... durch planmässiges Tattonieren.
[... through systematic, palpable experimentation.]

--Johann Karl Friedrich Gauss [*asked how he came upon his theorems*]

On this chapter, you will get deeper knowledge of PyTables internals. PyTables has several places where you can improve the performance of your application. If you are planning to deal with really large data, you should read carefully this section in order to learn how to get an important efficiency boost for your code. But if your dataset is small (say, up to 10 MB), you should not worry about that as the default parameters in PyTables are already tuned for those sizes.

5.1. Informing PyTables about expected number of rows in tables or arrays

The underlying HDF5 library that is used by PyTables allows for certain datasets (the *chunked* datasets) to take the data in bunches of a certain length, so-called *chunks*, to write them on disk as a whole, i.e. the HDF5 library treats chunks as atomic objects and disk I/O is always made in terms of complete chunks. This allows data filters to be defined by the application to perform tasks such as compression, encryption, checksumming, etc. on entire chunks.

An in-memory B-tree is used to map chunk structures on disk. The more chunks that are allocated for a dataset the larger the B-tree. Large B-trees take memory and cause file storage overhead as well as more disk I/O and higher contention for the metadata cache. Consequently, it's important to balance between memory and I/O overhead (small B-trees) and time to access data (big B-trees).

PyTables can determine an optimum chunk size to make B-trees adequate to your dataset size if you help it by providing an estimation of the final number of rows for an extensible leaf¹. This must be made at leaf creation time by passing this value to the `expectedrows` argument of the `createTable()` method (see [description](#)) and `createEArray()` method (see [Section](#)). For `VLArray` leaves, pass the expected size in MBytes by using the argument `expectedsizeinMB` of `createVLArray()` (see [Section](#)) instead.

When your leaf size is bigger than 10 MB (take this figure only as a reference, not strictly), by providing this guess of the number of rows you will be optimizing the access to your data. When the table or array size is larger than, say 100MB, you are *strongly* suggested to provide such a guess; failing to do that may cause your application to do very slow I/O operations and to demand *huge* amounts of memory. You have been warned!

5.2. Accelerating your searches

If you are going to use a lot of searches like the next one:

```
result = [row['var2'] for row in table
          if row['var1'] > 2 and row['var1'] <= 20 and row['var2'] > 3]
```

(for future reference, we will call this the *regular* selection mode) and you want to improve the time taken to run it, keep reading.

¹CArray nodes, though not extensible, are chunked and have their optimum chunk size automatically computed at creation time, since their final shape is known.

5.2.1. In-kernel searches

PyTables provides a way to accelerate data selections relating to a single table, through the use of the `Table.where()` iterator and related query methods (see [Section 4.6.4](#)). We will call this mode of selecting data *in-kernel*. Let's see an example of *in-kernel* selection based on the *regular* selection mentioned above:

```
result = [row['var2'] for row in table.where('var1 <= 20')]
```

This simple change of mode selection can account for an improvement in search times of more than 30x for large tables as you can see in [Figure 5.1](#).

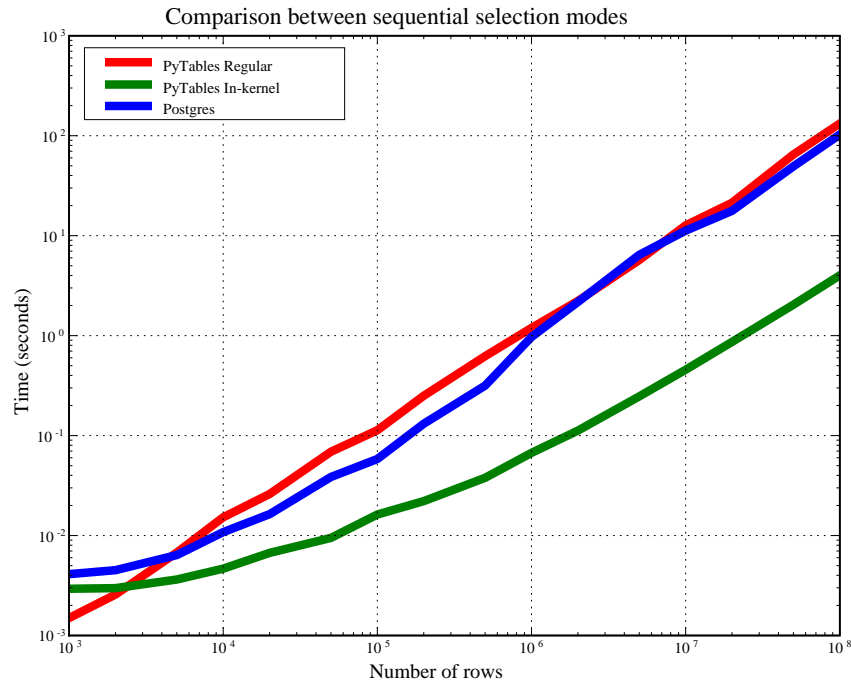


Figure 5.1. Times for different sequential selection modes over `Float64` values. Benchmark made on a machine with AMD Opteron (AMD64) @ 2 GHz processors with IDE disk @ 7200 RPM.

So, where is the trick? It's easy. In the *regular* selection mode the data for column `var1` has to be carried up into Python space so as to evaluate the condition and decide if the `var2` value should be added to the `result` list. On the contrary, in the *in-kernel* mode, the *condition* is passed to the PyTables kernel (hence the name), written in C, and evaluated there at C speed (with the help of the integrated Numexpr package, see [\[11\]](#)), so that the only values that are brought to Python space are the rows that fulfilled the condition. Hence, for selections that only have a tiny number of hits (compared with the total amount of rows), the savings are huge.

Incidentally, in-kernel searches are not only much faster than regular PyTables queries, but also much more than sequential queries in relational databases coded in pure C (see the Postgres line in [Figure 5.1](#)). I'm not completely sure about the reasons of why in-kernel queries work so fast in comparison with relational engines made in C, but a couple of reasons come to my mind:

- PyTables implements adaptive buffers (i.e. their size grows as the table grows) for doing I/O. This fact, combined with the use of the highly optimized HDF5 hyperslice reads, allows for a very high data input speed.

- In addition, PyTables uses the powerful Numexpr computing kernel, written in C, for evaluating mathematical expressions (see [11]). This kernel takes full advantage of on-die caches in modern processors for achieving a very high computing throughput (and, in particular, allowing ultra-fast condition evaluations).

Furthermore, you can mix the *in-kernel* and *regular* selection modes for evaluating arbitrarily complex conditions making use of external functions. Look at this example:

```
result = [ row['var2']
           for row in table.where('(var3 == "foo") & (var1 <= 20)')
           if your_function(row['var2']) ]
```

Here, we use an *in-kernel* selection to choose rows according to the values of the `var3` and `var1` fields. Then, we apply a *regular* selection to complete the query. Of course, when you mix the *in-kernel* and *regular* selection modes you should pass the most restrictive condition to the *in-kernel* part, i.e. to the `where()` iterator. In situations where it is not clear which is the most restrictive condition, you might want to experiment a bit in order to find the best combination.

However, since in-kernel condition strings allow rich expressions with multiple columns, variables, arithmetic operations and some functions, it is unlikely that you will be forced to use external regular selections in conditions of small to medium complexity. See [Appendix B](#) for more information on in-kernel condition syntax.

5.2.2. Indexed searches



Note

Indexing is only available in PyTables Pro.

When you need more speed than *in-kernel* selections can offer you, PyTables offers a third selection method, the so-called *indexed* mode (based on the highly efficient, extremely large datasets oriented, OPSI indexing engine [20]). In this mode, you have to decide which column(s) you are going to do your selections on, and index them. Indexing is just a kind of sort operation over a column, so that next searches along such a column will look at this sorted information using kind of a *binary search* which is much faster than a typical *sequential search*.

You can index the columns you want by calling the `Column.createIndex()` method (see [description](#)) on an already created table. For example:

```
indexrows = table.cols.var1.createIndex()
indexrows = table.cols.var2.createIndex()
indexrows = table.cols.var3.createIndex()
```

will create indexes for all `var1`, `var2` and `var3` columns.

After you have indexed a column, PyTables will try to use the index in your queries. However, as the query optimizer is not very sophisticated right now² it is recommended that you avoid placing comparisons involving indexed columns too deep into the condition expression in order to maximise the chances of actually using indexes. See below for examples where the optimizer can safely determine if an index can be used or not.

Example conditions where an index can be used:

- `var1 >= "foo"` (`var1` is used)
- `var1 >= mystr` (`var1` is used)
- `(var1 >= "foo") & (var3 > 10)` (`var1` is used)

²We plan to address this limitation in the short future.

- `(var1 >= "foo") & (var4 > 0.0)` (var1 is used)
- `("bar" <= var1) & (var1 < "foo")` (var1 is used)
- `((("bar" <= var1) & (var1 < "foo"))) & (var4 > 0.0)` (var1 is used)

Example conditions where an index can *not* be used:

- `var4 > 0.0` (var4 is not indexed)
- `var1 != 0.0` (range has two pieces)
- `(var1 >= "foo") | (var3 > 10)` (conditions are ORed)



Note

If you want to know for sure whether a particular query will use indexing or not (without actually running it), you are advised to use the `Table.willQueryUseIndexing()` method (see [description](#)).

One important aspect of indexing in PyTables is that it has been designed from the ground up with the goal of being capable to effectively manage very large tables. In [Figure 5.2](#), you can see that the times to index columns in tables are pretty short. In particular, the time to index a column with 1 billion rows (1 gigarow) with no index optimization is roughly 15 min. while indexing the same column with full optimization is around 100 min., which are a quite small figures compared with a relational database (in this case, Postgres 8), which takes more than 500 min. for doing the same job. This is because PyTables has chosen an algorithm that does a *partial* sort of the columns in order to ensure contained indexing times. On the contrary, most relational databases try to do a *complete* sort of columns, and this fact makes the time to create an index much bigger.

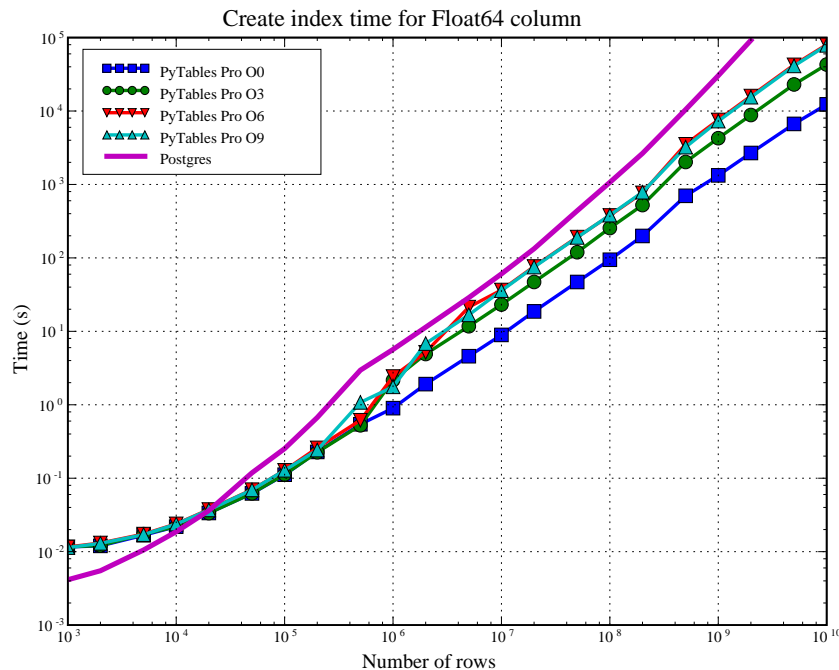


Figure 5.2. Times for indexing a Float64 column. Benchmark made on a machine with AMD Opteron (AMD64) @ 2 GHz processors with IDE disk @ 7200 RPM.

Another important feature to stress out is the aforementioned capability of PyTables to support a customizable quality for indexes, allowing the user to select the best one that suits her needs. This quality can be specified by passing the desired `optlevel` argument to the `createIndex()` method (see [description](#)). In the figures 5.3 and 5.4 you can see the effect in lookup time of specifying several optimization levels.

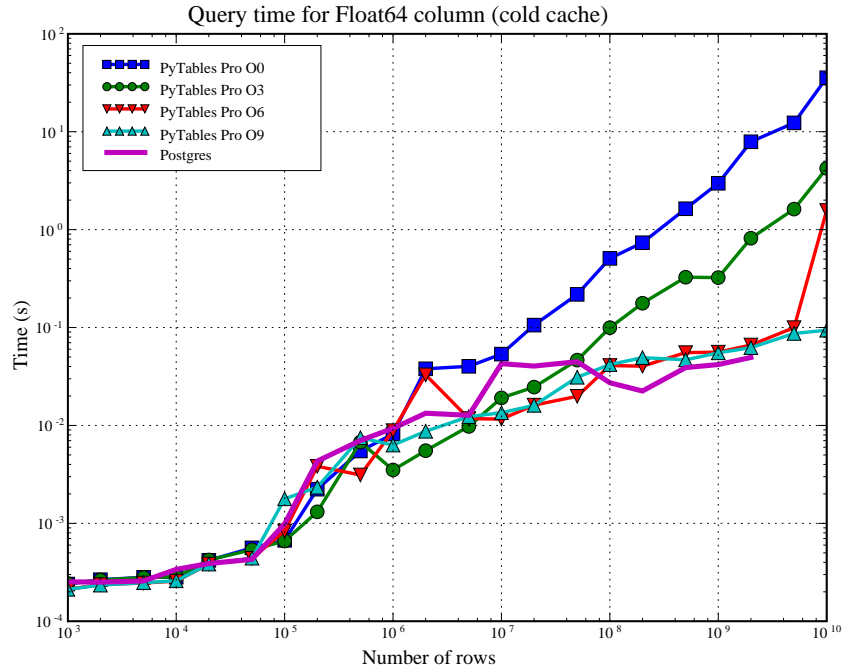


Figure 5.3. Times for querying a Float64 column with a cold cache (mean of 10 first queries). Benchmark made on a machine with AMD Opteron (AMD64) @ 2 GHz processors with IDE disk @ 7200 RPM.

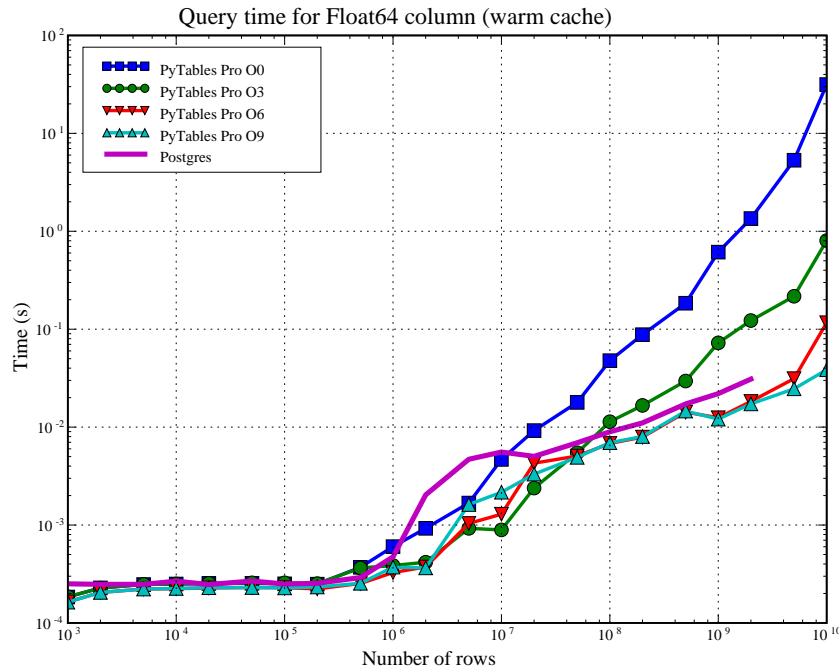


Figure 5.4. Times for querying a Float64 column with a warm cache (mean of 500 queries). Benchmark made on a machine with AMD Opteron (AMD64) @ 2 GHz processors with IDE disk @ 7200 RPM.

It is worth to say that, in figures 5.3 and 5.4, the query was chosen so as to return 0 rows (0 hits query). This has been done that way in order to have a measure of the *pure* lookup time, and not taking in account the *retrieving* time for actual data (see Figure 5.6 for a graph measuring retrieval times for different number of hits in range queries).

As an aside, let's point out that, despite the fact that relational databases use a complete sorting algorithm for indexes might induce the reader to think that they would be faster for searching purposes than the PyTables approach, this is not necessarily the case (or, at least, not always), as you can see in the figures 5.3 and 5.4. This is because when one chooses a high optimization level for medium to large table sizes (< 10 billions of rows), the PyTables indexing engine can effectively achieve a complete sorting, making its lookup times usually faster than using a relational database (most specially if compression is used). For very large tables (> 10 billions of rows) the PyTables indexing engine cannot normally achieve the goal of getting a completely sorted index. However, this is not a grave limitation in practice because the time required for completing such a complete sort in a traditional relational database can be huge, so it is not normally worth the effort doing this, while, on its hand, PyTables can still perform a *partial* sort in a reasonable amount of time while keeping very good lookup times. In other words, the PyTables engine scales much better than relational databases, so don't worry if you have extremely large columns to index: PyTables is designed to cope with that perfectly.

In addition, PyTables implements an efficient cache for (small) results of queries. Such a cache can be very important in cases where you repeat the same query interspersed with others. In that case, the repeated queries will be done very fast as you can see in Figure 5.5, effectively accelerating the whole query process.

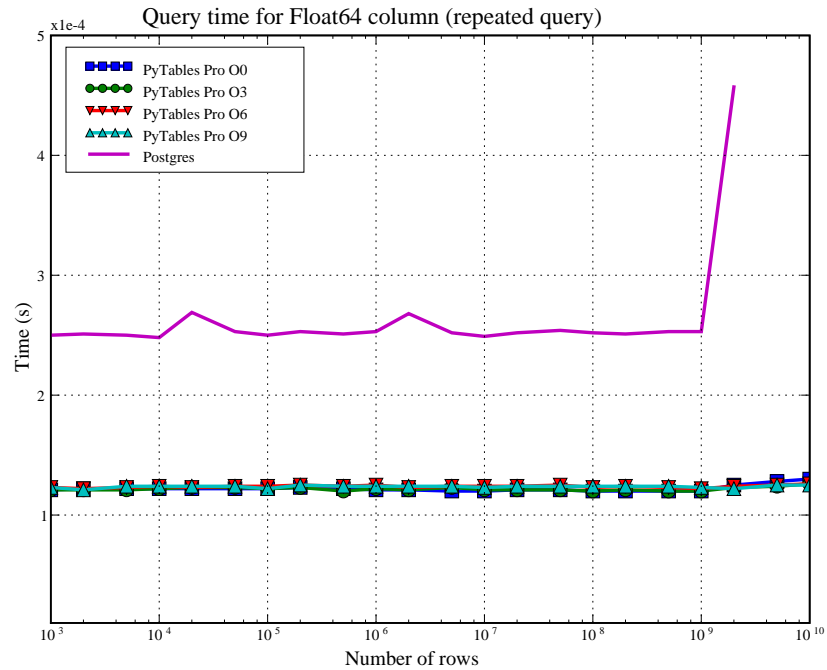


Figure 5.5. Times for doing a query that is already in cache for a Float64 column. Benchmark made on a machine with AMD Opteron (AMD64) @ 2 GHz processors with IDE disk @ 7200 RPM.

Finally, let's conclude this section with a view at how PyTables indexed searches does perform for queries with different result sizes (or number of hits). In Figure 5.6 you can see the mean time for the first 5 distinct queries (but having approximately the same number of hits) along a table with one billion of rows (a gigarow) for different query ranges (and hence, having different number of hits) for the next query:

```
results = [ row[col4] for row in
    table.where("(inf<=col4) & (col4<=sup) & (sqrt(col1+3.1*col2+col3*col4) >
3) ") ]
```

where *col4* is an indexed float64 column and *col1*, *col2* and *col3* are unindexed ones (of types int32, float64 and int32 respectively). The *inf* and *sup* values defines the query range. You can see how, for a number of hits greater than 10, PyTables performs between 2x and 50x faster than a traditional relational database (in this case, Postgres 8). Again, this is the consequence of the combination of a highly optimized access to data through the HDF5 library and the use of Numexpr ([11]) for quick evaluation of complex expressions for each row.

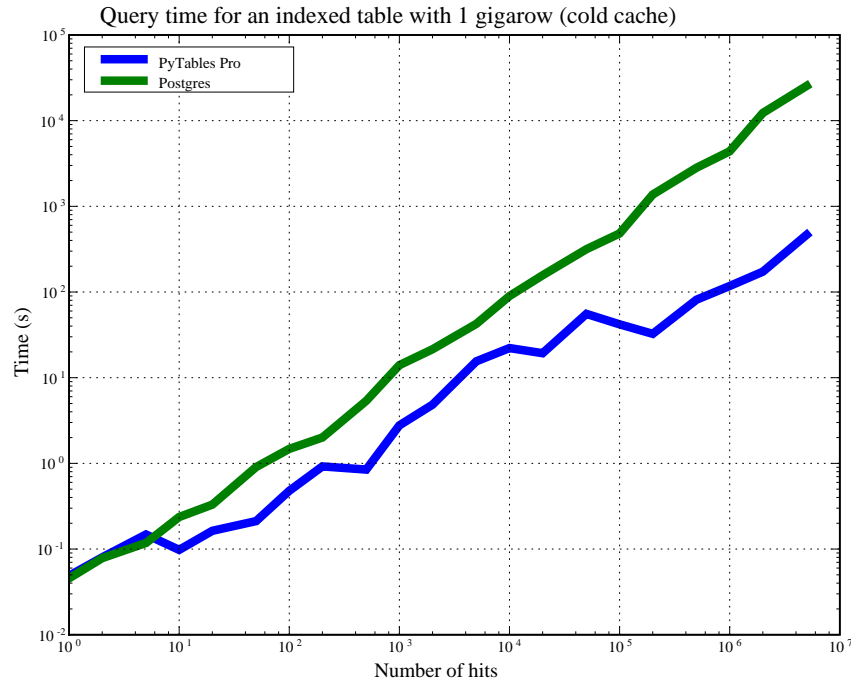


Figure 5.6. Times for doing a query with different number of hits on a indexed table with one gigarow. Benchmark made on a machine with AMD Opteron (AMD64) @ 2 GHz processors with IDE disk @ 7200 RPM.

You can find a more complete description and benchmarking about OPSI, the indexing system of PyTables Pro in [20].

5.3. Compression issues

One of the beauties of PyTables is that it supports compression on tables and arrays³, although it is not used by default. Compression of big amounts of data might be a bit controversial feature, because compression has a legend of being a very big consumer of CPU time resources. However, if you are willing to check if compression can help not only by reducing your dataset file size but *also* by improving I/O efficiency, specially when dealing with very large datasets, keep reading.

The compression library used by default is the *Zlib* (see [12]). Since *HDF5* *requires* it, you can safely use it and expect that your *HDF5* files will be readable on any other platform that has *HDF5* libraries installed. *Zlib* provides good compression ratio, although somewhat slow, and reasonably fast decompression. Because of that, it is a good candidate to be used for compressing your data.

However, in some situations it is critical to have a *very good decompression speed* (at the expense of lower compression ratios or more CPU wasted on compression, as we will see soon). In others, the emphasis is put in achieving the *maximum compression ratios*, no matter which reading speed will result. This is why support for two additional compressors has been added to PyTables: *LZO* (see [13]) and *bzip2* (see [14]). Following the author of *LZO* (and checked by the author of this section, as you will see soon), *LZO* offers pretty fast compression and extremely fast decompression. In fact, *LZO* is so fast when compressing/decompressing that it may well happen (that depends on your data, of course) that writing or reading a compressed dataset is sometimes faster than if it is not compressed at all (specially when dealing with extremely large datasets). This fact is very important, specially if you have to deal with very large amounts of data. Regarding *bzip2*, it has a reputation of achieving excellent compression ratios, but at the price of spending much more CPU time, which results in very low compression/decompression speeds.

³Except for Array objects.

Be aware that the LZO and bzip2 support in PyTables is not standard on HDF5, so if you are going to use your PyTables files in other contexts different from PyTables you will not be able to read them. Still, see the [Section D.2](#) (where the `ptrepack` utility is described) to find a way to free your files from LZO or bzip2 dependencies, so that you can use these compressors locally with the warranty that you can replace them with Zlib (or even remove compression completely) if you want to use these files with other HDF5 tools or platforms afterwards.

In order to allow you to grasp what amount of compression can be achieved, and how this affects performance, a series of experiments has been carried out. All the results presented in this section (and in the next one) have been obtained with synthetic data and using PyTables 1.3. Also, the tests have been conducted on a IBM OpenPower 720 (e-series) with a PowerPC G5 at 1.65 GHz and a hard disk spinning at 15K RPM. As your data and platform may be totally different for your case, take this just as a guide because your mileage may vary. Finally, and to be able to play with tables with a number of rows as large as possible, the record size has been chosen to be small (16 bytes). Here is its definition:

```
class Bench(IsDescription):
    var1 = StringCol(length=4)
    var2 = IntCol()
    var3 = FloatCol()
```

With this setup, you can look at the compression ratios that can be achieved in [Figure 5.7](#). As you can see, LZO is the compressor that performs worse in this sense, but, curiously enough, there is not much difference between Zlib and bzip2.

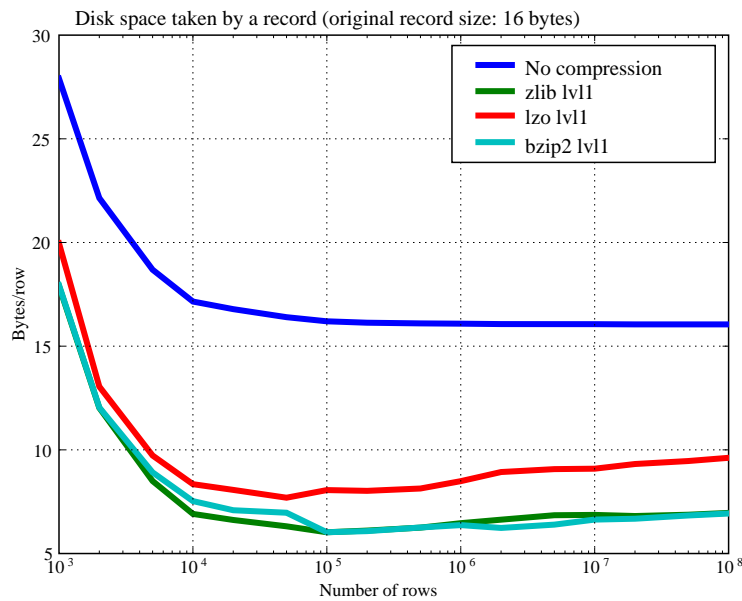


Figure 5.7. Comparison between different compression libraries.

Also, PyTables lets you select different compression levels for Zlib and bzip2, although you may get a bit disappointed by the small improvement that these compressors show when dealing with a combination of numbers and strings as in our example. As a reference, see plot [5.8](#) for a comparison of the compression achieved by selecting different levels of Zlib. Very oddly, the best compression ratio corresponds to level 1 (!). See later for an explanation and more figures on this subject.

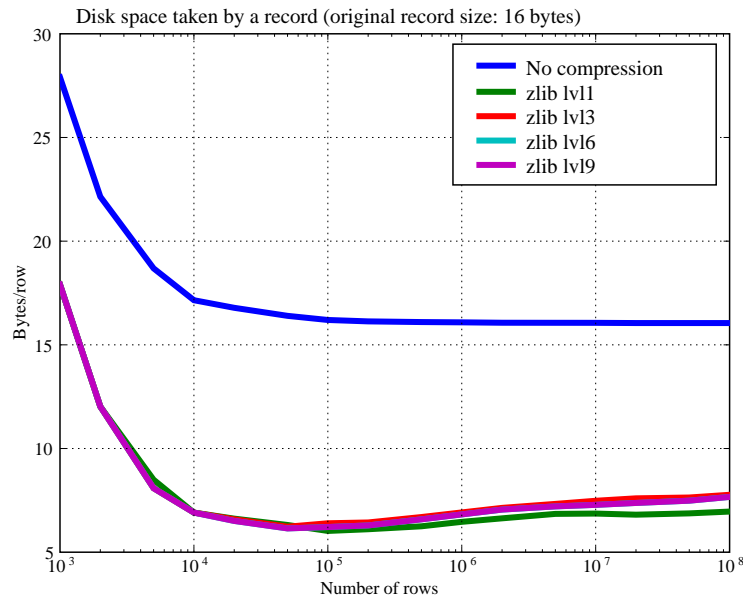


Figure 5.8. Comparison between different compression levels of Zlib.

Have also a look at [Figure 5.9](#). It shows how the speed of writing rows evolves as the size (number of rows) of the table grows. Even though in these graphs the size of one single row is 16 bytes, you can most probably extrapolate these figures to other row sizes.

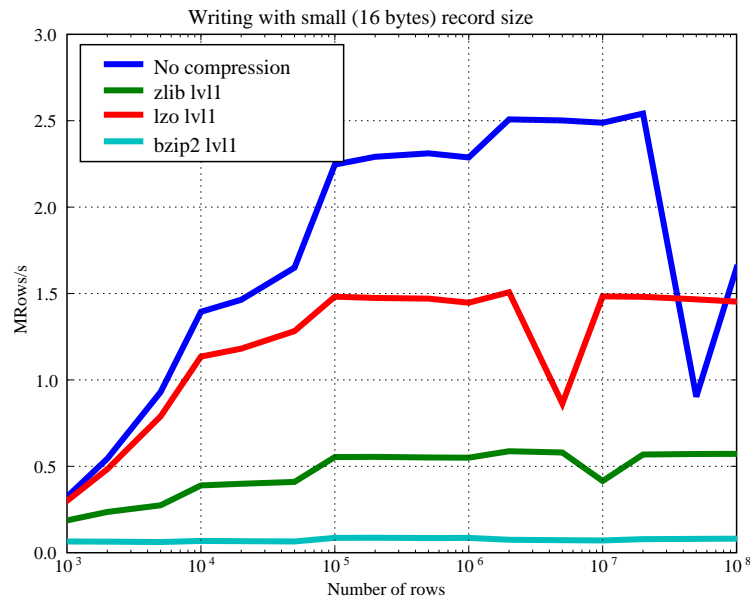


Figure 5.9. Writing tables with several compressors.

In [Figure 5.10](#) you can see how compression affects the reading performance. In fact, what you see in the plot is an *in-kernel selection* speed, but provided that this operation is very fast (see [Section 5.2.1](#)), we can accept it as an actual read test. Compared with the reference line without compression, the general trend here is that LZ0 does not affect

too much the reading performance (and in some points it is actually better), Zlib makes speed drop to a half, while bzip2 is performing very slow (up to 8x slower).

Also, in the same [Figure 5.10](#) you can notice some strange peaks in the speed that we might be tempted to attribute to libraries on which PyTables relies (HDF5, compressors...), or to PyTables itself. However, [Figure 5.11](#) reveals that, if we put the file in the filesystem cache (by reading it several times before, for example), the evolution of the performance is much smoother. So, the most probable explanation would be that such peaks are a consequence of the underlying OS filesystem, rather than a flaw in PyTables (or any other library behind it). Another consequence that can be derived from the aforementioned plot is that LZO decompression performance is much better than Zlib, allowing an improvement in overall speed of more than 2x, and perhaps more important, the read performance for really large datasets (i.e. when they do not fit in the OS filesystem cache) can be actually *better* than not using compression at all. Finally, one can see that reading performance is very badly affected when bzip2 is used (it is 10x slower than LZO and 4x than Zlib), but this was somewhat expected anyway.

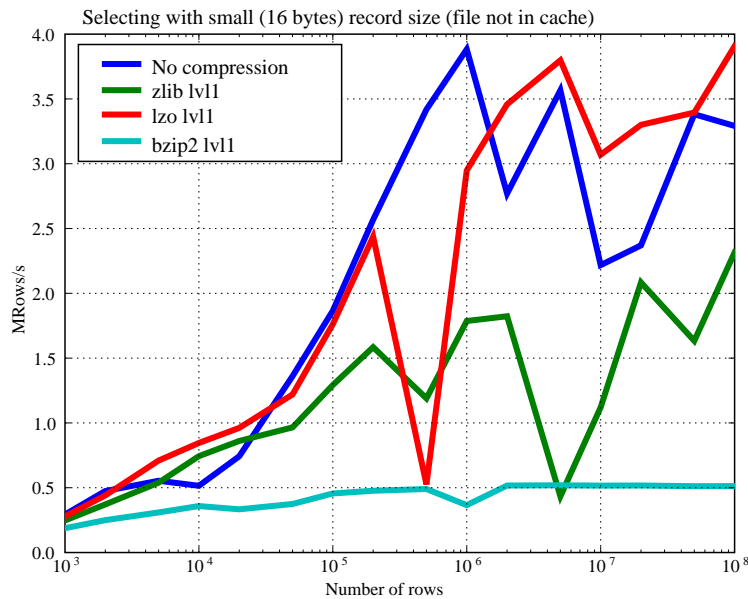


Figure 5.10. Selecting values in tables with several compressors. The file is not in the OS cache.

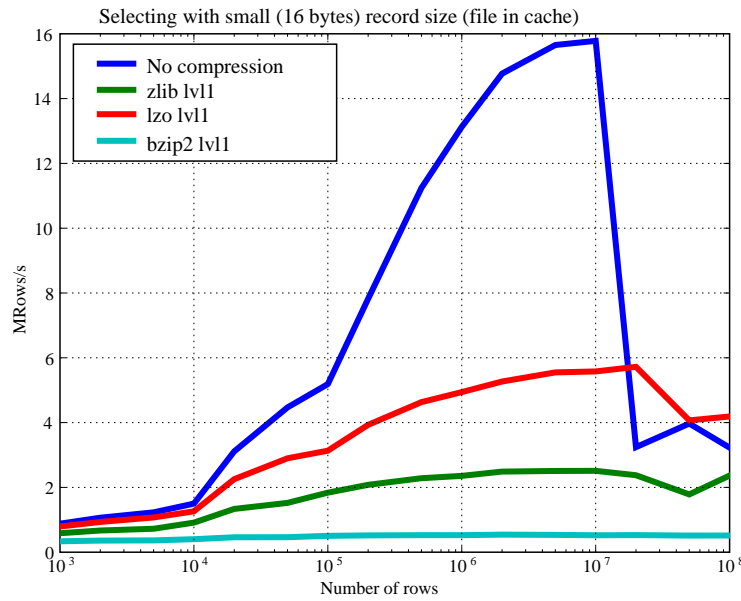


Figure 5.11. Selecting values in tables with several compressors. The file is in the OS cache.

So, generally speaking and looking at the experiments above, you can expect that LZO will be the fastest in both compressing and decompressing, but the one that achieves the worse compression ratio (although that may be just OK for many situations, specially when used with shuffling —see [Section 5.4](#)). bzip2 is the slowest, by large, in both compressing and decompressing, and besides, it does not achieve any better compression ratio than Zlib. Zlib represents a balance between them: it's somewhat slow compressing (2x) and decompressing (3x) than LZO, but it normally achieves better compression ratios.

Finally, by looking at the plots [5.12](#), [5.13](#), and the aforementioned [5.8](#) you can see why the recommended compression level to use for all compression libraries is 1. This is the lowest level of compression, but as the size of the underlying HDF5 chunk size is normally rather small compared with the size of compression buffers, there is not much point in increasing the latter (i.e. increasing the compression level). Nonetheless, in some situations (like for example, in extremely large tables or arrays, where the computed chunk size can be rather large) you may want to check, on your own, how the different compression levels do actually affect your application.

You can select the compression library and level by setting the `complib` and `complevel` keywords in the `Filters` class (see [Section 4.14.1](#)). A compression level of 0 will completely disable compression (the default), 1 is the less memory and CPU time demanding level, while 9 is the maximum level and the most memory demanding and CPU intensive. Finally, have in mind that LZO is not accepting a compression level right now, so, when using LZO, 0 means that compression is not active, and any other value means that LZO is active.

So, in conclusion, if your ultimate goal is writing and reading as fast as possible, choose LZO. If you want to reduce as much as possible your data, while retaining acceptable read speed, choose Zlib. Finally, if portability is important for you, Zlib is your best bet. So, when you want to use bzip2? Well, looking at the results, it is difficult to recommend its use in general, but you may want to experiment with it in those cases where you know that it is well suited for your data pattern (for example, for dealing with repetitive string datasets).

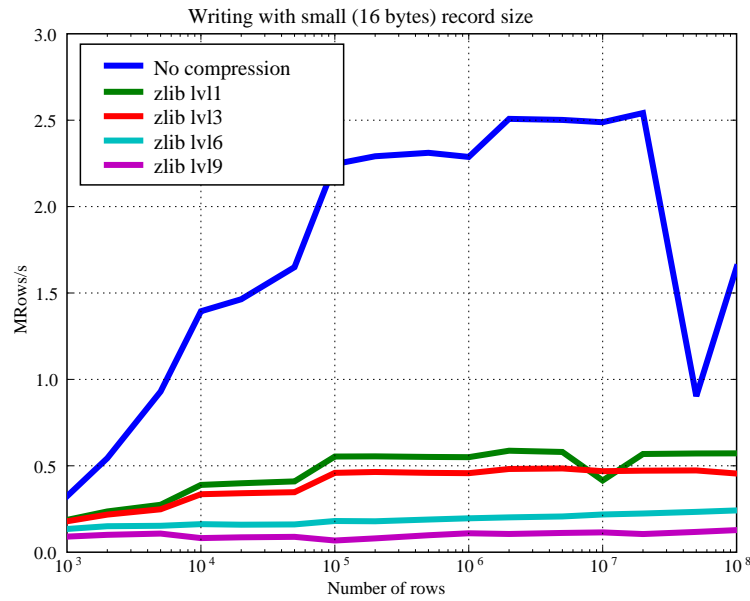


Figure 5.12. Writing in tables with different levels of compression.

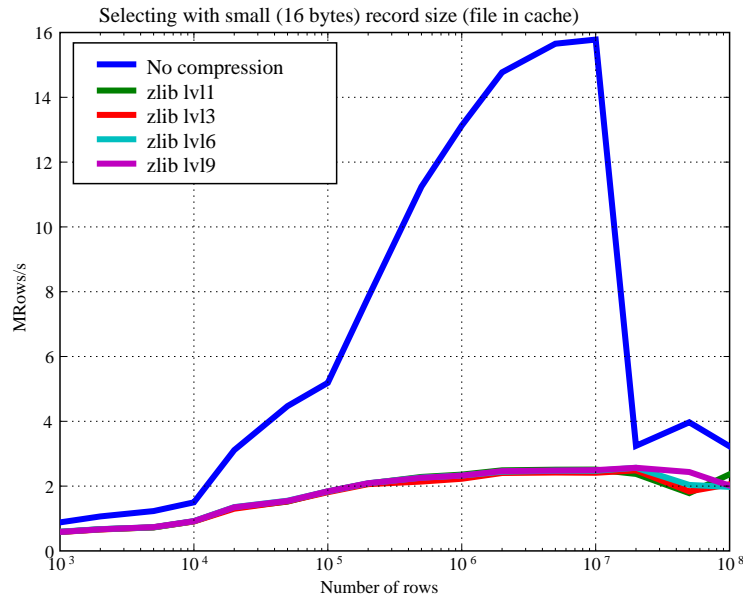


Figure 5.13. Selecting values in tables with different levels of compression. The file is in the OS cache.

5.4. Shuffling (or how to make the compression process more effective)

The HDF5 library provides an interesting filter that can leverage the results of your favorite compressor. Its name is *shuffle*, and because it can greatly benefit compression and it does not take many CPU resources (see below for

a justification), it is active *by default* in PyTables whenever compression is activated (independently of the chosen compressor). It is deactivated when compression is off (which is the default, as you already should know). Of course, you can deactivate it if you want, but this is not recommended.

So, how does this mysterious filter exactly work? From the HDF5 reference manual: “The shuffle filter de-interlaces a block of data by reordering the bytes. All the bytes from one consistent byte position of each data element are placed together in one block; all bytes from a second consistent byte position of each data element are placed together a second block; etc. For example, given three data elements of a 4-byte datatype stored as 012301230123, shuffling will re-order data as 000111222333. This can be a valuable step in an effective compression algorithm because the bytes in each byte position are often closely related to each other and putting them together can increase the compression ratio.”

In [Figure 5.14](#) you can see a benchmark that shows how the *shuffle* filter can help the different libraries in compressing data. In this experiment, shuffle has made LZO compress almost 3x more (!), while Zlib and bzip2 are seeing improvements of 2x. Once again, the data for this experiment is synthetic, and *shuffle* seems to do a great work with it, but in general, the results will vary in each case⁴.

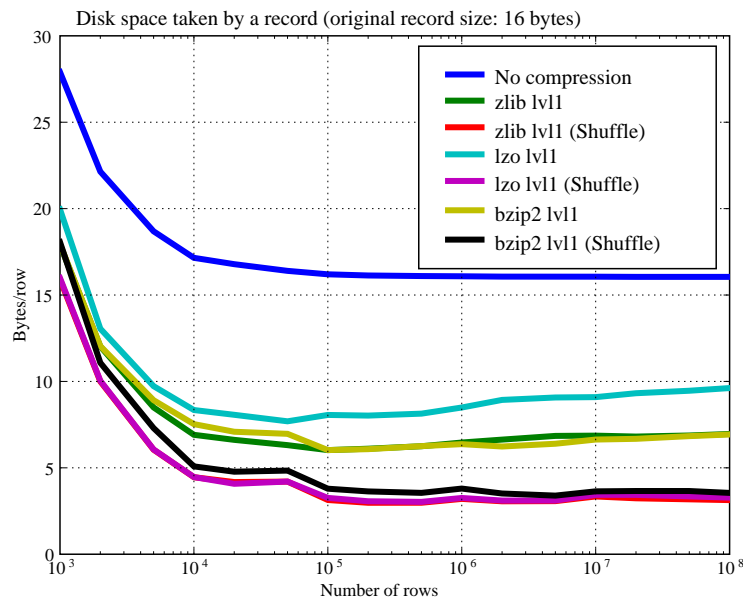


Figure 5.14. Comparison between different compression libraries with and without the *shuffle* filter.

At any rate, the most remarkable fact about the *shuffle* filter is the relatively high level of compression that compressor filters can achieve when used in combination with it. A curious thing to note is that the Bzip2 compression rate does not seem very much improved (less than a 40%), and what is more striking, Bzip2+shuffle does compress quite *less* than Zlib+shuffle or LZO+shuffle combinations, which is kind of unexpected. The thing that seems clear is that Bzip2 is not very good at compressing patterns that result of shuffle application. As always, you may want to experiment with your own data before widely applying the Bzip2+shuffle combination in order to avoid surprises.

Now, how does shuffling affect performance? Well, if you look at plots [5.15](#), [5.16](#) and [5.17](#), you will get a somewhat unexpected (but pleasant) surprise. Roughly, *shuffle* makes the writing process (shuffling+compressing) faster (approximately a 15% for LZO, 30% for Bzip2 and a 80% for Zlib), which is an interesting result by itself. But perhaps more exciting is the fact that the reading process (unshuffling+decompressing) is also accelerated by a similar extent (a 20% for LZO, 60% for Zlib and a 75% for Bzip2, roughly).

⁴Some users reported that the typical improvement with real data is between a factor 1.5x and 2.5x over the already compressed datasets.

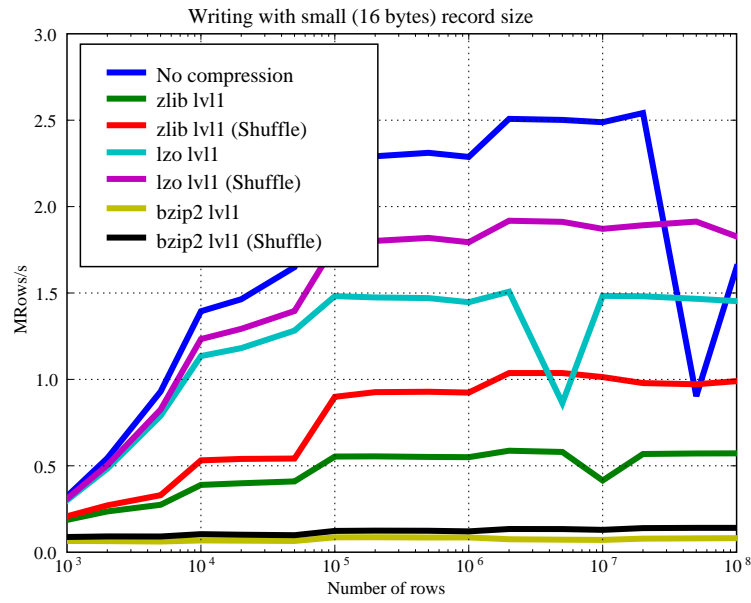


Figure 5.15. Writing with different compression libraries with and without the *shuffle* filter.

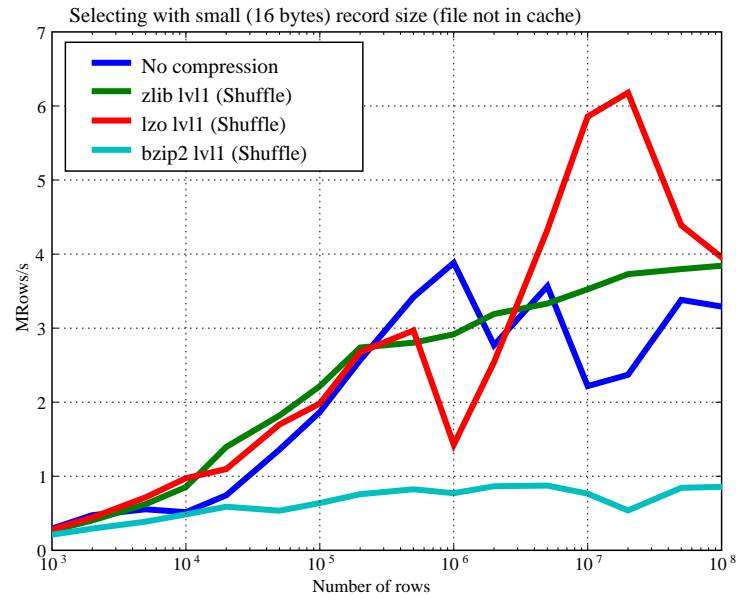


Figure 5.16. Reading with different compression libraries with the *shuffle* filter. The file is not in OS cache.

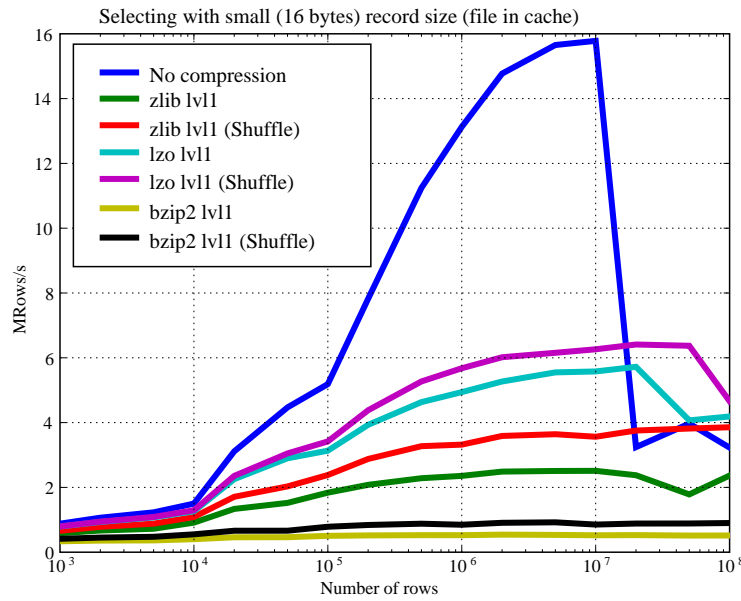


Figure 5.17. Reading with different compression libraries with and without the *shuffle* filter. The file is in OS cache.

You may wonder why introducing another filter in the write/read pipelines does effectively accelerate the throughput. Well, maybe data elements are more similar or related column-wise than row-wise, i.e. contiguous elements in the same column are more alike, so shuffling makes the job of the compressor easier (faster) and more effective (greater ratios). As a side effect, compressed chunks do fit better in the CPU cache (at least, the chunks are smaller!) so that the process of unshuffle/decompress can make a better use of the cache (i.e. reducing the number of CPU cache faults).

So, given the potential gains (faster writing and reading, but specially much improved compression level), it is a good thing to have such a filter enabled by default in the battle for discovering redundancy when you want to compress your data, just as PyTables does.

5.5. Using Psyco

Psyco (see [16]) is a kind of specialized compiler for Python that typically accelerates Python applications with no change in source code. You can think of Psyco as a kind of just-in-time (JIT) compiler, a little bit like Java's, that emits machine code on the fly instead of interpreting your Python program step by step. The result is that your unmodified Python programs run faster.

Psyco is very easy to install and use, so in most scenarios it is worth to give it a try. However, it only runs on Intel 386 architectures, so if you are using other architectures, you are out of luck (and, moreover, it seems that there are no plans to support other platforms). Besides, with the addition of flexible (and very fast) in-kernel queries (by the way, they cannot be optimized at all by Psyco), the use of Psyco will only help in rather few scenarios. In fact, the only important situation that you might benefit right now from using Psyco (I mean, in PyTables contexts) is for speeding-up the write speed in tables when using the Row interface (see [Section 4.6.7, “The Row class”](#)). But again, this latter case can also be accelerated by using the `Table.append()` (see [description](#)) method and building your own buffers.

As an example, imagine that you have a small script that reads and selects data over a series of datasets, like this:

```
def readFile(filename):
    "Select data from all the tables in filename"
```

```

fileh = openFile(filename, mode = "r")
result = []
for table in fileh("/ ", 'Table'):
    result = [p['var3'] for p in table if p['var2'] <= 20]

fileh.close()
return result

if __name__=="__main__":
    print readFile("myfile.h5")

```

In order to accelerate this piece of code, you can rewrite your main program to look like:

```

if __name__=="__main__":
    import psyco
    psyco.bind(readFile)
    print readFile("myfile.h5")

```

That's all!. From now on, each time that you execute your Python script, Psyco will deploy its sophisticated algorithms so as to accelerate your calculations.

You can see in the graphs 5.18 and 5.19 how much I/O speed improvement you can get by using Psyco. By looking at this figures you can get an idea if these improvements are of your interest or not. In general, if you are not going to use compression you will take advantage of Psyco if your tables are medium sized (from a thousand to a million rows), and this advantage will disappear progressively when the number of rows grows well over one million. However if you use compression, you will probably see improvements even beyond this limit (see Section 5.3). As always, there is no substitute for experimentation with your own dataset.

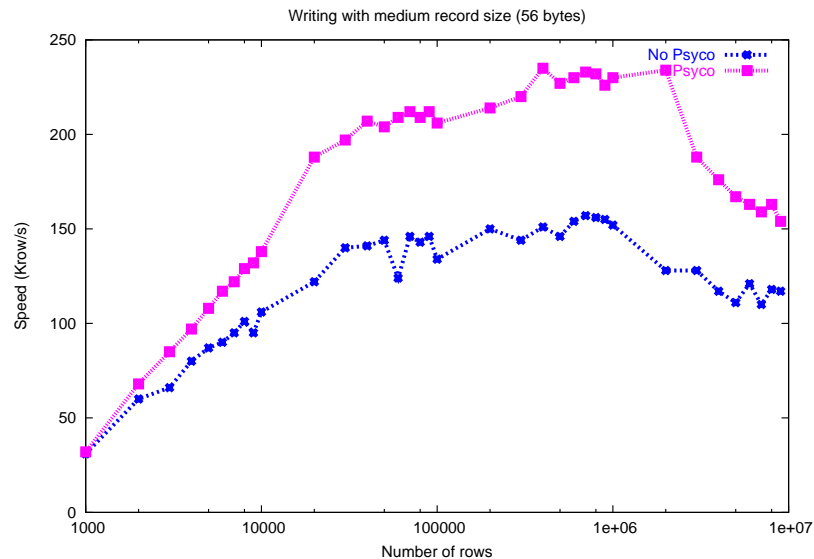


Figure 5.18. Writing tables with/without Psyco.

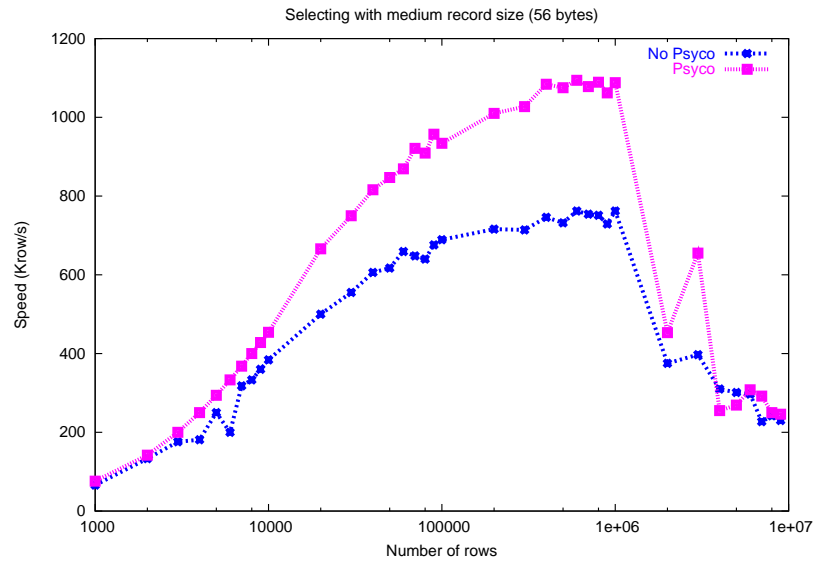


Figure 5.19. Reading tables with/without Psycio.

5.6. Getting the most from the node LRU cache

One limitation of the initial versions of PyTables was that they needed to load all nodes in a file completely before being ready to deal with them, making the opening times for files with a lot of nodes very high and unacceptable in many cases.

Starting from PyTables 1.2, a new LRU cache was introduced that avoids loading all the nodes of the *object tree* in memory. This cache is responsible of loading just up to a certain amount of nodes and discard the least recent used ones when there is a need to load new ones. This represents a big advantage over the old schema, specially in terms of memory usage (as there is no need to load *every* node in memory), but it also adds very convenient optimizations for working interactively like, for example, speeding-up the opening times of files with lots of nodes, allowing to open almost any kind of file in typically less than one tenth of second (compare this with the more than 10 seconds for files with more than 10000 nodes in PyTables pre-1.2 era). See [19] for more info on the advantages (and also drawbacks) of this approach.

One thing that deserves some discussion is the election of the parameter that sets the maximum amount of nodes to be held in memory at any time. As PyTables is meant to be deployed in machines that have potentially low memory, the default for it is quite conservative (you can look at its actual value in the `NODE_CACHE_SIZE` parameter in module `tables/parameters.py`). However, if you usually have to deal with files that have many more nodes than the maximum default, and you have a lot of free memory in your system, then you may want to experiment which is the appropriate value of `NODE_CACHE_SIZE` that fits better your needs.

As an example, look at the next code:

```
def browse_tables(filename):
    fileh = openFile(filename, 'a')
    group = fileh.root.newgroup
    for j in range(10):
        for tt in fileh.walkNodes(group, "Table"):
            title = tt.attrs.TITLE
            for row in tt:
```

```
pass
fileh.close()
```

We will be running the code above against a couple of files having a `/newgroup` containing 100 tables and 1000 tables respectively. We will run this small benchmark for different values of the LRU cache size, specifically 256 and 1024. You can see the results in [Table 5.1](#).

| | | 100 nodes | | | | 1000 nodes | | | |
|------------------------|------------|-------------|------|-----------|------|-------------|------|-----------|------|
| | | Memory (MB) | | Time (ms) | | Memory (MB) | | Time (ms) | |
| Node is coming from... | Cache size | 256 | 1024 | 256 | 1024 | 256 | 1024 | 256 | 1024 |
| Disk | | 14 | 14 | 1.24 | 1.24 | 51 | 66 | 1.33 | 1.31 |
| Cache | | 14 | 14 | 0.53 | 0.52 | 65 | 73 | 1.35 | 0.68 |

Table 5.1. Retrieval speed and memory consumption depending on the number of nodes in LRU cache.

From the data in [Table 5.1](#), one can see that when the number of objects that you are dealing with does fit in cache, you will get better access times to them. Also, incrementing the node cache size does effectively consume more memory *only* if the total nodes exceeds the slots in cache; otherwise the memory consumption remains the same. It is also worth noting that incrementing the node cache size in the case you want to fit all your nodes in cache does not take much more memory than being too conservative. On the other hand, it might happen that the speed-up that you can achieve by allocating more slots in your cache is not worth the amount of memory used.

Anyway, if you feel that this issue is important for you, set your own experiments up and proceed to fine-tune the `NODE_CACHE_SIZE` parameter.



Note

PyTables Pro sports an optimized LRU cache node written in C, so you should expect significantly faster LRU cache operations when working with it.

5.7. Compacting your PyTables files

Let's suppose that you have a file where you have made a lot of row deletions on one or more tables, or deleted many leaves or even entire subtrees. These operations might leave *holes* (i.e. space that is not used anymore) in your files that may potentially affect not only the size of the files but, more importantly, the performance of I/O. This is because when you delete a lot of rows in a table, the space is not automatically recovered on the fly. In addition, if you add many more rows to a table than specified in the `expectedrows` keyword at creation time this may affect performance as well, as explained in [Section 5.1](#).

In order to cope with these issues, you should be aware that PyTables includes a handy utility called `ptrepack` which can be very useful not only to compact *fragmented* files, but also to adjust some internal parameters in order to use better buffer and chunk sizes for optimum I/O speed. Please check the [Section D.2](#) for a brief tutorial on its use.

Another thing that you might want to use `ptrepack` for is changing the compression filters or compression levels on your existing data for different goals, like checking how this can affect both final size and I/O performance, or getting rid of the optional compressors like `LZO` or `bzip2` in your existing files, in case you want to use them with generic HDF5 tools that do not have support for these filters.

Part II. Complementary modules

Chapter 6. `filenode` - simulating a filesystem with PyTables

6.1. What is `filenode`?

`filenode` is a module which enables you to create a PyTables database of nodes which can be used like regular opened files in Python. In other words, you can store a file in a PyTables database, and read and write it as you would do with any other file in Python. Used in conjunction with PyTables hierarchical database organization, you can have your database turned into an open, extensible, efficient, high capacity, portable and metadata-rich filesystem for data exchange with other systems (including backup purposes).

Between the main features of `filenode`, one can list:

- *Open*: Since it relies on PyTables, which in turn, sits over HDF5 (see [1]), a standard hierarchical data format from NCSA.
- *Extensible*: You can define new types of nodes, and their instances will be safely preserved (as are normal groups, leafs and attributes) by PyTables applications having no knowledge of their types. Moreover, the set of possible attributes for a node is not fixed, so you can define your own node attributes.
- *Efficient*: Thanks to PyTables' proven extreme efficiency on handling huge amounts of data, `filenode` can make use of PyTables' on-the-fly compression and decompression of data.
- *High capacity*: Since PyTables and HDF5 are designed for massive data storage (they use 64-bit addressing even where the platform does not support it natively).
- *Portable*: Since the HDF5 format has an architecture-neutral design, and the HDF5 libraries and PyTables are known to run under a variety of platforms. Besides that, a PyTables database fits into a single file, which poses no trouble for transportation.
- *Metadata-rich*: Since PyTables can store arbitrary key-value pairs (even Python objects!) for every database node. Metadata may include authorship, keywords, MIME types and encodings, ownership information, access control lists (ACL), decoding functions and anything you can imagine!

6.2. Finding a `filenode` node

`filenode` nodes can be recognized because they have a `NODE_TYPE` system attribute with a 'file' value. It is recommended that you use the `getNodeAttr()` method (see [description](#)) of `tables.File` class to get the `NODE_TYPE` attribute independently of the nature (group or leaf) of the node, so you do not need to care about.

6.3. `filenode` - simulating files inside PyTables

The `filenode` module is part of the `nodes` sub-package of PyTables. The recommended way to import the module is:

```
>>> from tables.nodes import filenode
```

However, `filenode` exports very few symbols, so you can import `*` for interactive usage. In fact, you will most probably only use the `NodeType` constant and the `newNode()` and `openNode()` calls.

The `NodeType` constant contains the value that the `NODE_TYPE` system attribute of a node file is expected to contain ('file', as we have seen). Although this is not expected to change, you should use `filenode.NodeType` instead of the literal 'file' when possible.

`newNode()` and `openNode()` are the equivalent to the Python `file()` call (alias `open()`) for ordinary files. Their arguments differ from that of `file()`, but this is the only point where you will note the difference between working with a node file and working with an ordinary file.

For this little tutorial, we will assume that we have a PyTables database opened for writing. Also, if you are somewhat lazy at typing sentences, the code that we are going to explain is included in the `examples/filenodes1.py` file.

You can create a brand new file with these sentences:

```
>>> import tables
>>> h5file = tables.openFile('fnode.h5', 'w')
```

6.3.1. Creating a new file node

Creation of a new file node is achieved with the `newNode()` call. You must tell it in which PyTables file you want to create it, where in the PyTables hierarchy you want to create the node and which will be its name. The PyTables file is the first argument to `newNode()`; it will be also called the 'host PyTables file'. The other two arguments must be given as keyword arguments `where` and `name`, respectively. As a result of the call, a brand new appendable and readable file node object is returned.

So let us create a new node file in the previously opened `h5file` PyTables file, named 'fnode_test' and placed right under the root of the database hierarchy. This is that command:

```
>>> fnode = filenode.newNode(h5file, where='/', name='fnode_test')
```

That is basically all you need to create a file node. Simple, isn't it? From that point on, you can use `fnode` as any opened Python file (i.e. you can write data, read data, lines of text and so on).

`newNode()` accepts some more keyword arguments. You can give a title to your file with the `title` argument. You can use PyTables' compression features with the `filters` argument. If you know beforehand the size that your file will have, you can give its final file size in bytes to the `expectedsize` argument so that the PyTables library would be able to optimize the data access.

`newNode()` creates a PyTables node where it is told to. To prove it, we will try to get the `NODE_TYPE` attribute from the newly created node.

```
>>> print h5file.getNodeAttr('/fnode_test', 'NODE_TYPE')
file
```

6.3.2. Using a file node

As stated above, you can use the new node file as any other opened file. Let us try to write some text in and read it.

```
>>> print >> fnode, "This is a test text line."
>>> print >> fnode, "And this is another one."
>>> print >> fnode
>>> fnode.write("Of course, file methods can also be used.")
>>>
>>> fnode.seek(0) # Go back to the beginning of file.
>>>
>>> for line in fnode:
...     print repr(line)
```



```
'This is a test text line.\n'
'And this is another one.\n'
'\n'
'Of course, file methods can also be used.'
```

This was run on a Unix system, so newlines are expressed as `'\n'`. In fact, you can override the line separator for a file by setting its `lineSeparator` property to any string you want.

While using a file node, you should take care of closing it *before* you close the PyTables host file. Because of the way PyTables works, your data it will not be at a risk, but every operation you execute after closing the host file will fail with a `ValueError`. To close a file node, simply delete it or call its `close()` method.

```
>>> fnode.close()
>>> print fnode.closed
True
```

6.3.3. Opening an existing file node

If you have a file node that you created using `newNode()`, you can open it later by calling `openNode()`. Its arguments are similar to that of `file()` or `open()`: the first argument is the PyTables node that you want to open (i.e. a node with a `NODE_TYPE` attribute having a `'file'` value), and the second argument is a mode string indicating how to open the file. Contrary to `file()`, `openNode()` can not be used to create a new file node.

File nodes can be opened in read-only mode (`'r'`) or in read-and-append mode (`'a+'`). Reading from a file node is allowed in both modes, but appending is only allowed in the second one. Just like Python files do, writing data to an appendable file places it after the file pointer if it is on or beyond the end of the file, or otherwise after the existing data. Let us see an example:

```
>>> node = h5file.root.fnode_test
>>> fnode = filenode.openNode(node, 'a+')
>>> print repr(fnode.readline())
'This is a test text line.\n'
>>> print fnode.tell()
26
>>> print >> fnode, "This is a new line."
>>> print repr(fnode.readline())
''
```

Of course, the data append process places the pointer at the end of the file, so the last `readline()` call hit EOF. Let us seek to the beginning of the file to see the whole contents of our file.

```
>>> fnode.seek(0)
>>> for line in fnode:
...     print repr(line)
'This is a test text line.\n'
'And this is another one.\n'
'\n'
'Of course, file methods can also be used.This is a new line.\n'
```

As you can check, the last string we wrote was correctly appended at the end of the file, instead of overwriting the second line, where the file pointer was positioned by the time of the appending.

6.3.4. Adding metadata to a file node

You can associate arbitrary metadata to any open node file, regardless of its mode, as long as the host PyTables file is writable. Of course, you could use the `setNodeAttr()` method of `tables.File` to do it directly on the proper

node, but `filenode` offers a much more comfortable way to do it. `filenode` objects have an `attrs` property which gives you direct access to their corresponding `AttributeSet` object.

For instance, let us see how to associate MIME type metadata to our file node:

```
>>> fnode.attrs.content_type = 'text/plain; charset=us-ascii'
```

As simple as A-B-C. You can put nearly anything in an attribute, which opens the way to authorship, keywords, permissions and more. Moreover, there is not a fixed list of attributes. However, you should avoid names in all caps or starting with `'_'`, since `PyTables` and `filenode` may use them internally. Some valid examples:

```
>>> fnode.attrs.author = "Ivan Vilata i Balaguer"
>>> fnode.attrs.creation_date = '2004-10-20T13:25:25+0200'
>>> fnode.attrs.keywords_en = ["FileName", "test", "metadata"]
>>> fnode.attrs.keywords_ca = ["FileName", "prova", "metadades"]
>>> fnode.attrs.owner = 'ivan'
>>> fnode.attrs.acl = {'ivan': 'rw', '@users': 'r'}
```

You can check that these attributes get stored by running the `ptdump` command on the host `PyTables` file:

```
$ ptdump -a fnode.h5:/fnode_test
/fnode_test (EArray(113,)) ''
/fnode_test.attrs (AttributeSet), 14 attributes:
[CLASS := 'EARRAY',
EXTDIM := 0,
FLAVOR := 'numpy',
NODE_TYPE := 'file',
NODE_TYPE_VERSION := 2,
TITLE := '',
VERSION := '1.2',
acl := {'ivan': 'rw', '@users': 'r'},
author := 'Ivan Vilata i Balaguer',
content_type := 'text/plain; charset=us-ascii',
creation_date := '2004-10-20T13:25:25+0200',
keywords_ca := ['FileName', 'prova', 'metadades'],
keywords_en := ['FileName', 'test', 'metadata'],
owner := 'ivan']
```

Note that `filenode` makes no assumptions about the meaning of your metadata, so its handling is entirely left to your needs and imagination.

6.4. Complementary notes

You can use file nodes and `PyTables` groups to mimic a filesystem with files and directories. Since you can store nearly anything you want as file metadata, this enables you to use a `PyTables` file as a portable compressed backup, even between radically different platforms. Take this with a grain of salt, since node files are restricted in their naming (only valid Python identifiers are valid); however, remember that you can use node titles and metadata to overcome this limitation. Also, you may need to devise some strategy to represent special files such as devices, sockets and such (not necessarily using `filenode`).

We are eager to hear your opinion about `filenode` and its potential uses. Suggestions to improve `filenode` and create other node types are also welcome. Do not hesitate to contact us!

6.5. Current limitations

`filenode` is still a young piece of software, so it lacks some functionality. This is a list of known current limitations:

1. Node files can only be opened for read-only or read and append mode. This should be enhanced in the future.
2. There is no universal newline support yet. This is likely to be implemented in a near future.
3. Sparse files (files with lots of zeros) are not treated specially; if you want them to take less space, you should be better off using compression.

These limitations still make `filenode` entirely adequate to work with most binary and text files. Of course, suggestions and patches are welcome.

6.6. filenode module reference

6.6.1. Global constants

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| NodeType | Value for <code>NODE_TYPE</code> node system attribute. |
| NodeTypeVersions | Supported values for <code>NODE_TYPE_VERSION</code> node system attribute. |

6.6.2. Global functions

`newNode(h5file, where, name, title="", filters=None, expectedsize=1000)`

Creates a new file node object in the specified PyTables file object. Additional named arguments `where` and `name` must be passed to specify where the file node is to be created. Other named arguments such as `title` and `filters` may also be passed. The special named argument `expectedsize`, indicating an estimate of the file size in bytes, may also be passed. It returns the file node object.

`openNode(node, mode = 'r')`

Opens an existing file node. Returns a file node object from the existing specified PyTables node. If `mode` is not specified or it is `'r'`, the file can only be read, and the pointer is positioned at the beginning of the file. If `mode` is `'a'` or `'+'`, the file can be read and appended, and the pointer is positioned at the end of the file.

6.6.3. The `FileNode` abstract class

This is the ancestor of `ROFileNode` and `RAFileNode` (see below). Instances of these classes are returned when `newNode()` or `openNode()` are called. It represents a new file node associated with a PyTables node, providing a standard Python file interface to it.

This abstract class provides only an implementation of the reading methods needed to implement a file-like object over a PyTables node. The attribute set of the node becomes available via the `attrs` property. You can add attributes there, but try to avoid attribute names in all caps or starting with `'_'`, since they may clash with internal attributes.

The node used as storage is also made available via the read-only attribute `node`. Please do not tamper with this object unless unavoidably, since you may break the operation of the file node object.

The `lineSeparator` property contains the string used as a line separator, and defaults to `os.linesep`. It can be set to any reasonably-sized string you want.

The constructor sets the `closed`, `softspace` and `_lineSeparator` attributes to their initial values, as well as the `node` attribute to `None`. Sub-classes should set the `node`, `mode` and `offset` attributes.

Version 1 implements the file storage as a `UInt8` uni-dimensional `EArray`.

FileNode methods

getLineSeparator()

Returns the line separator string.

setLineSeparator()

Sets the line separator string.

getAttrs()

Returns the attribute set of the file node.

close()

Flushes the file and closes it. The `node` attribute becomes `None` and the `attrs` property becomes no longer available.

next()

Returns the next line of text. Raises `StopIteration` when lines are exhausted. See `file.next.__doc__` for more information.

read(size=None)

Reads at most `size` bytes. See `file.read.__doc__` for more information

readline(size=-1)

Reads the next text line. See `file.readline.__doc__` for more information

readlines(sizehint=-1)

Reads the text lines. See `file.readlines.__doc__` for more information.

seek(offset, whence=0)

Moves to a new file position. See `file.seek.__doc__` for more information.

tell()

Gets the current file position. See `file.tell.__doc__` for more information.

xreadlines()

For backward compatibility. See `file.xreadlines.__doc__` for more information.

6.6.4. The ROFileNode class

Instances of this class are returned when `openNode()` is called in read-only mode (`'r'`). This is a descendant of `FileNode` class, so it inherits all its methods. Moreover, it does not define any other useful method, just some protections against users intents to write on file.

6.6.5. The RAFileNode class

Instances of this class are returned when either `newNode()` is called or when `openNode()` is called in append mode (`'a+'`). This is a descendant of `FileNode` class, so it inherits all its methods. It provides additional methods that allow to write on file nodes.

flush()

Flushes the file node. See `file.flush.__doc__` for more information.

truncate(size=None)

Truncates the file node to at most `size` bytes. Currently, this method only makes sense to grow the file node, since data can not be rewritten nor deleted. See `file.truncate.__doc__` for more information.

write(string)

Writes the string to the file. Writing an empty string does nothing, but requires the file to be open. See `file.write.__doc__` for more information.

writelines(sequence)

Writes the sequence of strings to the file. See `file.writelines.__doc__` for more information.

Chapter 7. netcdf3 - a PyTables NetCDF3 emulation API

7.1. What is netcdf3?

The netCDF format is a popular format for binary files. It is portable between machines and self-describing, i.e. it contains the information necessary to interpret its contents. A free library provides convenient access to these files (see [6]). A very nice python interface to that library is available in the `Scientific Python NetCDF` module (see [17]). Although it is somewhat less efficient and flexible than HDF5, netCDF is geared for storing gridded data and is quite easy to use. It has become a de facto standard for gridded data, especially in meteorology and oceanography. The next version of netCDF (netCDF 4) will actually be a software layer on top of HDF5 (see [7]). The `tables.netcdf3` package does not create HDF5 files that are compatible with netCDF 4 (although this is a long-term goal).

7.2. Using the `tables.netcdf3` package

The package `tables.netcdf3` emulates the `Scientific.IO.NetCDF` API using PyTables. It presents the data in the form of objects that behave very much like arrays. A `tables.netcdf3` file contains any number of dimensions and variables, both of which have unique names. Each variable has a shape defined by a set of dimensions, and optionally attributes whose values can be numbers, number sequences, or strings. One dimension of a file can be defined as *unlimited*, meaning that the file can grow along that direction. In the sections that follow, a step-by-step tutorial shows how to create and modify a `tables.netcdf3` file. All of the code snippets presented here are included in `examples/netCDF_example.py`. The `tables.netcdf3` package is designed to be used as a drop-in replacement for `Scientific.IO.NetCDF`, with only minor modifications to existing code. The differences between `tables.netcdf3` and `Scientific.IO.NetCDF` are summarized in the last section of this chapter.

7.2.1. Creating/Opening/Closing a `tables.netcdf3` file

To create a `tables.netcdf3` file from python, you simply call the `NetCDFFile` constructor. This is also the method used to open an existing `tables.netcdf3` file. The object returned is an instance of the `NetCDFFile` class and all future access must be done through this object. If the file is open for write access ('w' or 'a'), you may write any type of new data including new dimensions, variables and attributes. The optional `history` keyword argument can be used to set the `history` `NetCDFFile` global file attribute. Closing the `tables.netcdf3` file is accomplished via the `close` method of `NetCDFFile` object.

Here's an example:

```
>>> import tables.netcdf3 as NetCDF
>>> import time
>>> history = 'Created ' + time.ctime(time.time())
>>> file = NetCDF.NetCDFFile('test.h5', 'w', history=history)
>>> file.close()
```

7.2.2. Dimensions in a `tables.netcdf3` file

NetCDF defines the sizes of all variables in terms of dimensions, so before any variables can be created the dimensions they use must be created first. A dimension is created using the `createDimension` method of the `NetCDFFile` object. A Python string is used to set the name of the dimension, and an integer value is used to set the size. To create an *unlimited* dimension (a dimension that can be appended to), the size value is set to `None`.

```
>>> import tables.netcdf3 as NetCDF
```

```
>>> file = NetCDF.NetCDFFile('test.h5', 'a')
>>> file.NetCDFFile.createDimension('level', 12)
>>> file.NetCDFFile.createDimension('time', None)
>>> file.NetCDFFile.createDimension('lat', 90)
```

All of the dimension names and their associated sizes are stored in a Python dictionary.

```
>>> print file.dimensions
{'lat': 90, 'time': None, 'level': 12}
```

7.2.3. Variables in a `tables.netcdf3` file

Most of the data in a `tables.netcdf3` file is stored in a netCDF variable (except for global attributes). To create a netCDF variable, use the `createVariable` method of the `NetCDFFile` object. The `createVariable` method has three mandatory arguments, the variable name (a Python string), the variable datatype described by a single character Numeric typecode string which can be one of `f` (Float32), `d` (Float64), `i` (Int32), `l` (Int32), `s` (Int16), `c` (CharType - length 1), `F` (Complex32), `D` (Complex64) or `l` (Int8), and a tuple containing the variable's dimension names (defined previously with `createDimension`). The dimensions themselves are usually defined as variables, called coordinate variables. The `createVariable` method returns an instance of the `NetCDFVariable` class whose methods can be used later to access and set variable data and attributes.

```
>>> times = file.createVariable('time', 'd', ('time',))
>>> levels = file.createVariable('level', 'i', ('level',))
>>> latitudes = file.createVariable('latitude', 'f', ('lat',))
>>> temp = file.createVariable('temp', 'f', ('time', 'level', 'lat',))
>>> pressure = file.createVariable('pressure', 'i', ('level', 'lat',))
```

All of the variables in the file are stored in a Python dictionary, in the same way as the dimensions:

```
>>> print file.variables
{'latitude': <tables.netcdf3.NetCDFVariable instance at 0x244f350>,
 'pressure': <tables.netcdf3.NetCDFVariable instance at 0x244f508>,
 'level': <tables.netcdf3.NetCDFVariable instance at 0x244f0d0>,
 'temp': <tables.netcdf3.NetCDFVariable instance at 0x244f3a0>,
 'time': <tables.netcdf3.NetCDFVariable instance at 0x2564c88>}
```

7.2.4. Attributes in a `tables.netcdf3` file

There are two types of attributes in a `tables.netcdf3` file, global (or file) and variable. Global attributes provide information about the dataset, or file, as a whole. Variable attributes provide information about one of the variables in the file. Global attributes are set by assigning values to `NetCDFFile` instance variables. Variable attributes are set by assigning values to `NetCDFVariable` instance variables.

Attributes can be strings, numbers or sequences. Returning to our example,

```
>>> file.description = 'bogus example to illustrate the use of tables.netcdf3'
>>> file.source = 'PyTables Users Guide'
>>> latitudes.units = 'degrees north'
>>> pressure.units = 'hPa'
>>> temp.units = 'K'
>>> times.units = 'days since January 1, 2005'
>>> times.scale_factor = 1
```

The `ncattrs` method of the `NetCDFFile` object can be used to retrieve the names of all the global attributes. This method is provided as a convenience, since using the built-in `dir` Python function will return a bunch of private

methods and attributes that cannot (or should not) be modified by the user. Similarly, the `ncattrs` method of a `NetCDFVariable` object returns all of the netCDF variable attribute names. These functions can be used to easily print all of the attributes currently defined, like this

```
>>> for name in file.ncattrs():
>>>     print 'Global attr', name, '=', getattr(file,name)
Global attr description = bogus example to illustrate the use of
    tables.netcdf3
Global attr history = Created Mon Nov  7 10:30:56 2005
Global attr source = PyTables Users Guide
```

Note that the `ncattrs` function is not part of the `Scientific.IO.NetCDF` interface.

7.2.5. Writing data to and retrieving data from a `tables.netcdf3` variable

Now that you have a netCDF variable object, how do you put data into it? If the variable has no *unlimited* dimension, you just treat it like a Numeric array object and assign data to a slice.

```
>>> import numpy
>>> levels[:] = numpy.arange(12)+1
>>> latitudes[:] = numpy.arange(-89,90,2)
>>> for lev in levels[:]:
>>>     pressure[:,:] = 1000.-100.*lev
>>> print 'levels = ',levels[:]
levels = [ 1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9 10 11 12]
>>> print 'latitudes =\n',latitudes[:]
latitudes =
[-89. -87. -85. -83. -81. -79. -77. -75. -73. -71. -69. -67. -65. -63.
-61. -59. -57. -55. -53. -51. -49. -47. -45. -43. -41. -39. -37. -35.
-33. -31. -29. -27. -25. -23. -21. -19. -17. -15. -13. -11.  -9.  -7.
-5.  -3.  -1.   1.   3.   5.   7.   9.  11.  13.  15.  17.  19.  21.
23.  25.  27.  29.  31.  33.  35.  37.  39.  41.  43.  45.  47.  49.
51.  53.  55.  57.  59.  61.  63.  65.  67.  69.  71.  73.  75.  77.
79.  81.  83.  85.  87.  89.]
```

Note that retrieving data from the netCDF variable object works just like a Numeric array too. If the netCDF variable has an *unlimited* dimension, and there is not yet an entry for the data along that dimension, the `append` method must be used.

```
>>> for n in range(10):
>>>     times.append(n)
>>> print 'times = ',times[:]
times = [ 0.  1.  2.  3.  4.  5.  6.  7.  8.  9.]
```

The data you append must have either the same number of dimensions as the `NetCDFVariable`, or one less. The shape of the data you append must be the same as the `NetCDFVariable` for all of the dimensions except the *unlimited* dimension. The length of the data along the *unlimited* dimension controls how many entries along the *unlimited* dimension are appended. If the data you append has one fewer number of dimensions than the `NetCDFVariable`, it is assumed that you are appending one entry along the *unlimited* dimension. For example, if the `NetCDFVariable` has shape `(10,50,100)` (where the dimension length of length 10 is the *unlimited* dimension), and you append an array of shape `(50,100)`, the `NetCDFVariable` will subsequently have a shape of `(11,50,100)`. If you append an array with shape `(5,50,100)`, the `NetCDFVariable` will have a new shape of `(15,50,100)`. Appending an array whose last two dimensions do not have a shape `(50,100)` will raise an exception. This append

method does not exist in the `Scientific.IO.NetCDF` interface, instead entries are appended along the *unlimited* dimension one at a time by assigning to a slice. This is the biggest difference between the `tables.netcdf3` and `Scientific.IO.NetCDF` interfaces.

Once data has been appended to any variable with an *unlimited* dimension, the `sync` method can be used to synchronize the sizes of all the other variables with an *unlimited* dimension. This is done by filling in missing values (given by the default `netCDF_FillValue`, which is intended to indicate that the data was never defined). The `sync` method is automatically invoked with a `NetCDFFile` object is closed. Once the `sync` method has been invoked, the filled-in values can be assigned real data with slices.

```
>>> print 'temp.shape before sync = ',temp.shape
temp.shape before sync = (0, 12, 90)
>>> file.sync()
>>> print 'temp.shape after sync = ',temp.shape
temp.shape after sync = (10L, 12, 90)
>>> from numpy import random_array
>>> for n in range(10):
>>>     temp[n] = 10.*random_array.random(pressure.shape)
>>>     print 'time, min/max temp, temp[n,0,0] = ',\
           times[n],min(temp[n].flat),max(temp[n].flat),temp[n,0,0]
time, min/max temp, temp[n,0,0] = 0.0 0.0122650898993 9.99259281158
6.13053750992
time, min/max temp, temp[n,0,0] = 1.0 0.00115821603686 9.9915933609
6.68516159058
time, min/max temp, temp[n,0,0] = 2.0 0.0152112031356 9.98737239838
3.60537290573
time, min/max temp, temp[n,0,0] = 3.0 0.0112022599205 9.99535560608
6.24249696732
time, min/max temp, temp[n,0,0] = 4.0 0.00519315246493 9.99831295013
0.225010097027
time, min/max temp, temp[n,0,0] = 5.0 0.00978941563517 9.9843454361
4.56814193726
time, min/max temp, temp[n,0,0] = 6.0 0.0159023851156 9.99160385132
6.36837291718
time, min/max temp, temp[n,0,0] = 7.0 0.0019518379122 9.99939727783
1.42762875557
time, min/max temp, temp[n,0,0] = 8.0 0.00390585977584 9.9909954071
2.79601073265
time, min/max temp, temp[n,0,0] = 9.0 0.0106026884168 9.99195957184
8.18835449219
```

Note that appending data along an *unlimited* dimension always increases the length of the variable along that dimension. Assigning data to a variable with an *unlimited* dimension with a slice operation does not change its shape. Finally, before closing the file we can get a summary of its contents simply by printing the `NetCDFFile` object. This produces output very similar to running `'ncdump -h'` on a netCDF file.

```
>>> print file
test.h5 {
dimensions:
  lat = 90 ;
  time = UNLIMITED ; // (10 currently)
  level = 12 ;
variables:
  float latitude('lat',) ;
    latitude:units = 'degrees north' ;
```

```

int pressure('level', 'lat') ;
    pressure:units = 'hPa' ;
int level('level',) ;
float temp('time', 'level', 'lat') ;
    temp:units = 'K' ;
double time('time',) ;
    time:scale_factor = 1 ;
    time:units = 'days since January 1, 2005' ;
// global attributes:
    :description = 'bogus example to illustrate the use of tables.netcdf3' ;
    :history = 'Created Wed Nov  9 12:29:13 2005' ;
    :source = 'PyTables Users Guild' ;
}

```

7.2.6. Efficient compression of `tables.netcdf3` variables

Data stored in `NetCDFVariable` objects is compressed on disk by default. The parameters for the default compression are determined from a `Filters` class instance (see section [Section 4.14.1](#)) with `complevel=6`, `complib='zlib'` and `shuffle=True`. To change the default compression, simply pass a `Filters` instance to `createVariable` with the `filters` keyword. If your data only has a certain number of digits of precision (say for example, it is temperature data that was measured with a precision of 0.1 degrees), you can dramatically improve compression by quantizing (or truncating) the data using the `least_significant_digit` keyword argument to `createVariable`. The *least significant digit* is the power of ten of the smallest decimal place in the data that is a reliable value. For example if the data has a precision of 0.1, then setting `least_significant_digit=1` will cause data the data to be quantized using `numpy.around(scale*data)/scale`, where `scale = 2**bits`, and `bits` is determined so that a precision of 0.1 is retained (in this case `bits=4`).

In our example, try replacing the line

```
>>> temp = file.createVariable('temp','f',('time','level','lat',))
```

with

```
>>> temp = file.createVariable('temp','f',('time','level','lat',),
                               least_significant_digit=1)
```

and see how much smaller the resulting file is.

The `least_significant_digit` keyword argument is not allowed in `Scientific.IO.NetCDF`, since netCDF version 3 does not support compression. The flexible, fast and efficient compression available in HDF5 is the main reason I wrote the `tables.netcdf3` package - my netCDF files were just getting too big.

The `createVariable` method has one other keyword argument not found in `Scientific.IO.NetCDF` - `expectedsize`. The `expectedsize` keyword can be used to set the expected number of entries along the *unlimited* dimension (default 10000). If you expect that your data will have an order of magnitude more or less than 10000 entries along the *unlimited* dimension, you may consider setting this keyword to improve efficiency (see [Section 5.1](#) for details).

7.3. `tables.netcdf3` package reference

7.3.1. Global constants

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| <code>_fillvalue_dict</code> | Dictionary whose keys are <code>NetCDFVariable</code> single character typecodes and whose values are the netCDF <code>_FillValue</code> for that typecode. |
|------------------------------|---|

ScientificIONetCDF_imported True if `Scientific.IO.NetCDF` is installed and can be imported.

7.3.2. The `NetCDFFile` class

NetCDFFile(filename, mode='r', history=None)

Opens an existing `tables.netcdf3` file (mode = 'r' or 'a') or creates a new one (mode = 'w'). The `history` keyword can be used to set the `NetCDFFile.history` global attribute (if mode = 'a' or 'w').

A `NetCDFFile` object has two standard attributes: `dimensions` and `variables`. The values of both are dictionaries, mapping dimension names to their associated lengths and variable names to variables. All other attributes correspond to global attributes defined in a netCDF file. Global file attributes are created by assigning to an attribute of the `NetCDFFile` object.

`NetCDFFile` methods

close()

Closes the file (after invoking the `sync` method).

sync()

Synchronizes the size of variables along the *unlimited* dimension, by filling in data with default `netCDF_FillValue`. Returns the length of the *unlimited* dimension. Invoked automatically when the `NetCDFFile` object is closed.

ncattrs()

Returns a list with the names of all currently defined netCDF global file attributes.

createDimension(name, length)

Creates a netCDF dimension with a name given by the Python string `name` and a size given by the integer `size`. If `size = None`, the dimension is *unlimited* (i.e. it can grow dynamically). There can be only one *unlimited* dimension in a file.

createVariable(name, type, dimensions, least_significant_digit= None, expectedsize=10000, filters=None)

Creates a new variable with the given `name`, `type`, and `dimensions`. The `type` is a one-letter Numeric typecode string which can be one of `f` (Float32), `d` (Float64), `i` (Int32), `l` (Int32), `s` (Int16), `c` (CharType - length 1), `F` (Complex32), `D` (Complex64) or `l` (Int8); the predefined type constants from `Numeric` can also be used. The `F` and `D` types are not supported in netCDF or `Scientific.IO.NetCDF`, if they are used in a `tables.netcdf3` file, that file cannot be converted to a true netCDF file nor can it be shared over the internet with OPeNDAP. Dimensions must be a tuple containing dimension names (strings) that have been defined previously by `createDimensions`. The `least_significant_digit` is the power of ten of the smallest decimal place in the variable's data that is a reliable value. If this keyword is specified, the variable's data truncated to this precision to improve compression. The `expectedsize` keyword can be used to set the expected number of entries along the *unlimited* dimension (default 10000). If you expect that your data will have an order of magnitude more or less than 10000 entries along the *unlimited* dimension, you may consider setting this keyword to improve efficiency (see [Section 5.1](#) for details). The `filters` keyword is a `PyTables.Filters` instance that describes how to store the data on disk. The default corresponds to `complevel=6`, `complib='zlib'`, `shuffle=True` and `fletcher32=False`.

nctoh5(filename, unpackshort=True, filters=None)

Imports the data in a netCDF version 3 file (`filename`) into a `NetCDFFile` object using `Scientific.IO.NetCDF` (`ScientificIONetCDF_imported` must be `True`). If `unpackshort=True`,

data packed as short integers (type `s`) in the netCDF file will be unpacked to type `f` using the `scale_factor` and `add_offset` netCDF variable attributes. The `filters` keyword can be set to a PyTables `Filters` instance to change the default parameters used to compress the data in the `tables.netcdf3` file. The default corresponds to `complevel=6`, `complib='zlib'`, `shuffle=True` and `fletcher32=False`.

h5tonc(filename, packshort=False, scale_factor=None, add_offset=None)

Exports the data in a `tables.netcdf3` file defined by the `NetCDFFile` instance into a netCDF version 3 file using `Scientific.IO.NetCDF` (`ScientificIO.NetCDF_imported` must be `True`). If `packshort=True` the dictionaries `scale_factor` and `add_offset` are used to pack data of type `f` as short integers (of type `s`) in the netCDF file. Since netCDF version 3 does not provide automatic compression, packing as short integers is a commonly used way of saving disk space (see this [page](http://www.cdc.noaa.gov/cdc/conventions/cdc_netcdf_standard.shtml) [http://www.cdc.noaa.gov/cdc/conventions/cdc_netcdf_standard.shtml] for more details). The keys of these dictionaries are the variable names to pack, the values are the `scale_factors` and offsets to use in the packing. The data are packed so that the original Float32 values can be reconstructed by multiplying the `scale_factor` and adding `add_offset`. The resulting netCDF file will have the `scale_factor` and `add_offset` variable attributes set appropriately.

7.3.3. The NetCDFVariable class

The `NetCDFVariable` constructor is not called explicitly, rather an `NetCDFVariable` instance is returned by an invocation of `NetCDFFile.createVariable`. `NetCDFVariable` objects behave like arrays, and have the standard attributes of arrays (such as `shape`). Data can be assigned or extracted from `NetCDFVariable` objects via slices.

NetCDFVariable methods

typecode()

Returns a single character typecode describing the type of the variable, one of `f` (Float32), `d` (Float64), `i` (Int32), `l` (Int32), `s` (Int16), `c` (CharType - length 1), `F` (Complex32), `D` (Complex64) or `l` (Int8).

append(data)

Append data to a variable along its *unlimited* dimension. The data you append must have either the same number of dimensions as the `NetCDFVariable`, or one less. The shape of the data you append must be the same as the `NetCDFVariable` for all of the dimensions except the *unlimited* dimension. The length of the data along the *unlimited* dimension controls how many entries along the *unlimited* dimension are appended. If the data you append has one fewer number of dimensions than the `NetCDFVariable`, it is assumed that you are appending one entry along the *unlimited* dimension. For variables without an *unlimited* dimension, data can simply be assigned to a slice without using the `append` method.

ncattrs()

Returns a list with all the names of the currently defined netCDF variable attributes.

assignValue(data)

Provided for compatibility with `Scientific.IO.NetCDF`. Assigns data to the variable. If the variable has an *unlimited* dimension, it is equivalent to `append(data)`. If the variable has no *unlimited* dimension, it is equivalent to assigning data to the variable with the slice `[:]`.

getValue()

Provided for compatibility with `Scientific.IO.NetCDF`. Returns all the data in the variable. Equivalent to extracting the slice `[:]` from the variable.

7.4. Converting between true netCDF files and tables.netcdf3 files

If `Scientific.IO.NetCDF` is installed, `tables.netcdf3` provides facilities for converting between true netCDF version 3 files and `tables.netcdf3` hdf5 files via the `NetCDFFile.h5tonc()` and `NetCDFFile.nctoh5()` class methods. Also, the `nctoh5` command-line utility (see [Section D.3](#)) uses the `NetCDFFile.nctoh5()` class method.

As an example, look how to convert a `tables.netcdf3` hdf5 file to a true netCDF version 3 file (named `test.nc`)

```
>>> scale_factor = {'temp': 1.75e-4}
>>> add_offset = {'temp': 5.}
>>> file.h5tonc('test.nc',packshort=True, \
                scale_factor=scale_factor,add_offset=add_offset)
packing temp as short integers ...
>>> file.close()
```

The dictionaries `scale_factor` and `add_offset` are used to optionally pack the data as short integers in the netCDF file. Since netCDF version 3 does not provide automatic compression, packing as short integers is a commonly used way of saving disk space (see this [page](http://www.cdc.noaa.gov/cdc/conventions/cdc_netcdf_standard.shtml) [http://www.cdc.noaa.gov/cdc/conventions/cdc_netcdf_standard.shtml] for more details). The keys of these dictionaries are the variable names to pack, the values are the `scale_factors` and `offsets` to use in the packing. The resulting netCDF file will have the `scale_factor` and `add_offset` variable attributes set appropriately.

To convert the netCDF file back to a `tables.netcdf3` hdf5 file:

```
>>> history = 'Convert from netCDF ' + time.ctime(time.time())
>>> file = NetCDF.NetCDFFile('test2.h5', 'w', history=history)
>>> nobjects, nbytes = file.nctoh5('test.nc',unpackshort=True)
>>> print nobjects,' objects converted from netCDF, totaling',nbytes,'bytes'
5 objects converted from netCDF, totaling 48008 bytes
>>> temp = file.variables['temp']
>>> times = file.variables['time']
>>> print 'temp.shape after h5 --> netCDF --> h5 conversion = ',temp.shape
temp.shape after h5 --> netCDF --> h5 conversion = (10L, 12, 90)
>>> for n in range(10):
>>>     print 'time, min/max temp, temp[n,0,0] = ',\
            times[n],min(temp[n].flat),max(temp[n].flat),temp[n,0,0]
time, min/max temp, temp[n,0,0] = 0.0 0.0123250000179 9.99257469177
6.13049983978
time, min/max temp, temp[n,0,0] = 1.0 0.001300000000354 9.99152469635
6.68507480621
time, min/max temp, temp[n,0,0] = 2.0 0.01530000000864 9.98732471466
3.60542488098
time, min/max temp, temp[n,0,0] = 3.0 0.0112749999389 9.99520015717
6.2423248291
time, min/max temp, temp[n,0,0] = 4.0 0.00532499980181 9.99817466736
0.225124999881
time, min/max temp, temp[n,0,0] = 5.0 0.00987500045449 9.98417472839
4.56827497482
time, min/max temp, temp[n,0,0] = 6.0 0.016000000076 9.99152469635
6.36832523346
time, min/max temp, temp[n,0,0] = 7.0 0.00200000009499 9.99922466278
1.42772495747
```

```
time, min/max temp, temp[n,0,0] = 8.0 0.00392499985173 9.9908246994
2.79605007172
time, min/max temp, temp[n,0,0] = 9.0 0.0107500003651 9.99187469482
8.18832492828
>>> file.close()
```

Setting `unpackshort=True` tells `nc2oh5` to unpack all of the variables which have the `scale_factor` and `add_offset` attributes back to floating point arrays. Note that `tables.netcdf3` files have some features not supported in netCDF (such as Complex data types and the ability to make any dimension *unlimited*). `tables.netcdf3` files which utilize these features cannot be converted to netCDF using `NetCDFFile.h5tonc`.

7.5. tables.netcdf3 file structure

A `tables.netcdf3` file consists of array objects (either `EArrays` or `CArrays`) located in the root group of a `pytables hdf5` file. Each of the array objects must have a `dimensions` attribute, consisting of a tuple of dimension names (the length of this tuple should be the same as the rank of the array object). Any array objects with one of the supported datatypes in a `pytables` file that conforms to this simple structure can be read with the `tables.netcdf3` package.

7.6. Sharing data in tables.netcdf3 files over the internet with OPeNDAP

`tables.netcdf3` datasets can be shared over the internet with the OPeNDAP protocol (<http://opendap.org>), via the python `opendap` module (<http://opendap.oceanografia.org>). A plugin for the python `opendap` server is included with the `pytables` distribution (`contrib/h5_dap_plugin.py`). Simply copy that file into the `plugins` directory of the `opendap` python module source distribution, run `python setup.py install`, point the `opendap` server to the directory containing your `tables.netcdf3` files, and away you go. Any OPeNDAP aware client (such as Matlab or IDL) will now be able to access your data over http as if it were a local disk file. The only restriction is that your `tables.netcdf3` files must have the extension `.h5` or `.hdf5`. Unfortunately, `tables.netcdf3` itself cannot act as an OPeNDAP client, although there is a client included in the `opendap` python module, and `Scientific.IO.NetCDF` can act as an OPeNDAP client if it is linked with the OPeNDAP netCDF client library. Either of these python modules can be used to remotely access `tables.netcdf3` datasets with OPeNDAP.

7.7. Differences between the Scientific.IO.NetCDF API and the tables.netcdf3 API

1. `tables.netcdf3` data is stored in an HDF5 file instead of a netCDF file.
2. Although each variable can have only one *unlimited* dimension in a `tables.netcdf3` file, it need not be the first as in a true NetCDF file. Complex data types `F` (Complex32) and `D` (Complex64) are supported in `tables.netcdf3`, but are not supported in netCDF (or `Scientific.IO.NetCDF`). Files with variables that have these datatypes, or an *unlimited* dimension other than the first, cannot be converted to netCDF using `h5tonc`.
3. Variables in a `tables.netcdf3` file are compressed on disk by default using HDF5 `zlib` compression with the *shuffle* filter. If the *least_significant_digit* keyword is used when a variable is created with the `createVariable` method, data will be truncated (quantized) before being written to the file. This can significantly improve compression. For example, if `least_significant_digit=1`, data will be quantized using `numpy.around(scale*data)/scale`, where `scale = 2**bits`, and `bits` is determined so that a precision of 0.1 is retained (in this case `bits=4`). From http://www.cdc.noaa.gov/cdc/conventions/cdc_netcdf_standard.shtml: “least_significant_digit -- power of ten of the smallest decimal place in unpacked data that is a reliable value.” Automatic data compression is not available in netCDF version 3, and hence is not available in the `Scientific.IO.NetCDF` module.

4. In `tables.netcdf3`, data must be appended to a variable with an *unlimited* dimension using the `append` method of the `netCDF` variable object. In `Scientific.IO.NetCDF`, data can be added along an *unlimited* dimension by assigning it to a slice (there is no `append` method). The `sync` method of a `tables.netcdf3` `NetCDFVariable` object synchronizes the size of all variables with an *unlimited* dimension by filling in data using the default `netCDF_FillValue`. The `sync` method is automatically invoked with a `NetCDFFile` object is closed. In `Scientific.IO.NetCDF`, the `sync()` method flushes the data to disk.
5. The `tables.netcdf3` `createVariable()` method has three extra optional keyword arguments not found in the `Scientific.IO.NetCDF` interface, *least_significant_digit* (see item (2) above), *expectedsize* and *filters*. The *expectedsize* keyword applies only to variables with an *unlimited* dimension, and is an estimate of the number of entries that will be added along that dimension (default 1000). This estimate is used to optimize HDF5 file access and memory usage. The *filters* keyword is a PyTables filters instance that describes how to store the data on disk. The default corresponds to `complevel=6`, `complib='zlib'`, `shuffle=True` and `fletcher32=False`.
6. `tables.netcdf3` data can be saved to a true netCDF file using the `NetCDFFile` class method `h5tonc` (if `Scientific.IO.NetCDF` is installed). The *unlimited* dimension must be the first (for all variables in the file) in order to use the `h5tonc` method. Data can also be imported from a true netCDF file and saved in an HDF5 `tables.netcdf3` file using the `nctoh5` class method.
7. In `tables.netcdf3` a list of attributes corresponding to global netCDF attributes defined in the file can be obtained with the `NetCDFFile.ncattrs` method. Similarly, netCDF variable attributes can be obtained with the `NetCDFVariable.ncattrs` method. These functions are not available in the `Scientific.IO.NetCDF` API.
8. You should not define `tables.netcdf3` global or variable attributes that start with `_NetCDF_`. Those names are reserved for internal use.
9. Output similar to 'ncdump -h' can be obtained by simply printing a `tables.netcdf3` `NetCDFFile` instance.

Part III. Appendixes

Appendix A. Supported data types in PyTables

All PyTables datasets can handle the complete set of data types supported by the NumPy (see [8]), ndarray (see [10]) and Numeric (see [9]) packages in Python. The data types for table fields can be set via instances of the `Col` class and its descendants (see [Section 4.13.2](#)), while the data type of array elements can be set through the use of the `Atom` class and its descendants (see [Section 4.13.3](#)).

PyTables uses ordinary strings to represent its *types*, with most of them matching the names of NumPy scalar types. Usually, a PyTables type consists of two parts: a *kind* and a *precision* in bits. The precision may be omitted in types with just one supported precision (like `bool`) or with a non-fixed size (like `string`).

There are eight kinds of types supported by PyTables:

- `bool`: Boolean (true/false) types. Supported precisions: 8 (default) bits.
- `int`: Signed integer types. Supported precisions: 8, 16, 32 (default) and 64 bits.
- `uint`: Unsigned integer types. Supported precisions: 8, 16, 32 (default) and 64 bits.
- `float`: Floating point types. Supported precisions: 32 and 64 (default) bits.
- `complex`: Complex number types. Supported precisions: 64 (32+32) and 128 (64+64, default) bits.
- `string`: Raw string types. Supported precisions: 8-bit positive multiples.
- `time`: Data/time types. Supported precisions: 32 and 64 (default) bits.
- `enum`: Enumerated types. Precision depends on base type.

The `time` and `enum` kinds are a little bit special, since they represent HDF5 types which have no direct Python counterpart, though atoms of these kinds have a more-or-less equivalent NumPy data type.

There are two types of `time`: 4-byte signed integer (`time32`) and 8-byte double precision floating point (`time64`). Both of them reflect the number of seconds since the Unix epoch, i.e. Jan 1 00:00:00 UTC 1970. They are stored in memory as NumPy's `int32` and `float64`, respectively, and in the HDF5 file using the `H5T_TIME` class. Integer times are stored on disk as such, while floating point times are split into two signed integer values representing seconds and microseconds (beware: smaller decimals will be lost!).

PyTables also supports HDF5 `H5T_ENUM` *enumerations* (restricted sets of unique name and unique value pairs). The NumPy representation of an enumerated value (an `Enum`, see [Section 4.14.3](#)) depends on the concrete *base type* used to store the enumeration in the HDF5 file. Currently, only scalar integer values (both signed and unsigned) are supported in enumerations. This restriction may be lifted when HDF5 supports other kinds on enumerated values.

Here you have a quick reference to the complete set of supported data types:

| Type Code | Description | C Type | Size (in bytes) | Python Counterpart |
|------------|--------------------------|------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| bool | boolean | unsigned char | 1 | bool |
| int8 | 8-bit integer | signed char | 1 | int |
| uint8 | 8-bit unsigned integer | unsigned char | 1 | int |
| int16 | 16-bit integer | short | 2 | int |
| uint16 | 16-bit unsigned integer | unsigned short | 2 | int |
| int32 | integer | int | 4 | int |
| uint32 | unsigned integer | unsigned int | 4 | long |
| int64 | 64-bit integer | long long | 8 | long |
| uint64 | unsigned 64-bit integer | unsigned long long | 8 | long |
| float32 | single-precision float | float | 4 | float |
| float64 | double-precision float | double | 8 | float |
| complex64 | single-precision complex | struct {float r, i;} | 8 | complex |
| complex128 | double-precision complex | struct {double r, i;} | 16 | complex |
| String | arbitrary length string | char[] | * | str |
| time32 | integer time | POSIX's time_t | 4 | int |
| time64 | floating point time | POSIX's struct timeval | 8 | float |
| enum | enumerated value | enum | - | - |

Table A.1. Data types supported for array elements and tables columns in PyTables.

Appendix B. Condition syntax

Conditions in PyTables are used in methods related with in-kernel and indexed searches such as `Table.where()` (see [description](#)) or `Table.readWhere()` (see [description](#)). They are interpreted using a customized version of Numexpr, a powerful package for C-speed computation of array operations (see [\[1\]](#)).

A condition on a table is just a *string* containing a Python expression involving *at least one column*, and maybe some constants and external variables, all combined with algebraic operators and functions. The result of a valid condition is always a *boolean array* of the same length as the table, where the *i*-th element is true if the value of the expression on the *i*-th row of the table evaluates to true¹. Usually, a method using a condition will only consider the rows where the boolean result is true.

For instance, the condition `'sqrt(x*x + y*y) < 1'` applied on a table with `x` and `y` columns consisting of floating point numbers results in a boolean array where the *i*-th element is true if (unsurprisingly) the value of the square root of the sum of squares of `x` and `y` is less than 1. The `sqrt()` function works element-wise, the `1` constant is adequately broadcast to an array of ones of the length of the table for evaluation, and the *less than* operator makes the result a valid boolean array. A condition like `'mycolumn'` alone will not usually be valid, unless `mycolumn` is itself a column of scalar, boolean values.

In the previous conditions, `mycolumn`, `x` and `y` are examples of *variables* which are associated with columns. Methods supporting conditions do usually provide their own ways of binding variable names to columns and other values. You can read the documentation of `Table.where()` (see [description](#)) for more information on that. Also, please note that the names `None`, `True` and `False`, besides the names of functions (see below) *can not be overridden*, but you can always define other new names for the objects you intend to use.

Values in a condition may have the following types:

- 8-bit boolean (`bool`).
- 32-bit signed integer (`int`).
- 64-bit signed integer (`long`).
- 64-bit, double-precision floating point number (`float`).
- 2x64-bit, double-precision complex number (`complex`).
- Raw string of bytes (`str`).

The types in PyTables conditions are somewhat stricter than those of Python. For instance, the *only* valid constants for booleans are `True` and `False`, and they are *never* automatically cast to integers. The type strengthening also affects the availability of operators and functions. Beyond that, the usual type inference rules apply.

Conditions support the set of operators listed below:

- Logical operators: `&`, `|`, `~`.
- Comparison operators: `<`, `<=`, `==`, `!=`, `>=`, `>`.
- Unary arithmetic operators: `-`.
- Binary arithmetic operators: `+`, `-`, `*`, `/`, `**`, `%`.

¹That is the reason why multidimensional fields in a table are not supported in conditions, since the truth value of each resulting multidimensional boolean value is not obvious.

Types do not support all operators. Boolean values only support logical and strict (in)equality comparison operators, while strings only support comparisons, numbers do not work with logical operators, and complex comparisons can only check for strict (in)equality. Unsupported operations (including invalid castings) raise `NotImplementedError` exceptions.

You may have noticed the special meaning of the usually bitwise operators `&`, `|` and `~`. Because of the way Python handles the short-circuiting of logical operators and the truth values of their operands, conditions must use the bitwise operator equivalents instead. This is not difficult to remember, but you must be careful because bitwise operators have a *higher precedence* than logical operators. For instance, `'a and b == c'` (*a is true AND b is equal to c*) is *not* equivalent to `'a & b == c'` (*a AND b is equal to c*). The safest way to avoid confusions is to *use parentheses* around logical operators, like this: `'a & (b == c)'`. Another effect of short-circuiting is that expressions like `'0 < x < 1'` will *not* work as expected; you should use `'(0 < x) & (x < 1)'`²

You can also use the following functions in conditions:

- `where(bool, number1, number2):` `number` — `number1` if the `bool` condition is true, `number2` otherwise.
- `{sin,cos,tan}(float|complex):` `float|complex` — trigonometric sinus, cosinus or tangent.
- `{arcsin,arccos,arctan}(float|complex):` `float|complex` — trigonometric inverse sinus, cosinus or tangent.
- `arctan2(float1, float2):` `float` — trigonometric inverse tangent of `float1/float2`.
- `{sinh,cosh,tanh}(float|complex):` `float|complex` — hyperbolic sinus, cosinus or tangent.
- `sqrt(float|complex):` `float|complex` — square root.
- `{real,imag}(complex):` `float` — real or imaginary part of complex.
- `complex(float, float):` `complex` — complex from real and imaginary parts.

²All of this may be solved if Python supported overloadable boolean operators (see PEP 335) or some kind of non-shortcircuiting boolean operators (like C's `&&`, `||` and `!`).

Appendix C. Using nested record arrays

C.1. Introduction

Nested record arrays are a generalization of the record array concept. Basically, a nested record array is a record array that supports nested datatypes. It means that columns can contain not only regular datatypes but also nested datatypes.

Each nested record array is a `NestedRecArray` object in the `tables.nra` package. Nested record arrays are intended to be as compatible as possible with ordinary record arrays (in fact the `NestedRecArray` class inherits from `RecArray`). As a consequence, the user can deal with nested record arrays nearly in the same way that he does with ordinary record arrays.

The easiest way to create a nested record array is to use the `array()` function in the `tables.nra` package. The only difference between this function and its non-nested capable analogous is that now, we *must* provide an structure for the buffer being stored. For instance:

```
>>> from tables.nra import array
>>> nra1 = array(
...     [(1, (0.5, 1.0), ('a1', 1j)), (2, (0, 0), ('a2', 1+1j))],
...     formats=['Int64', '(2,)Float32', ['a2', 'Complex64']])
```

will create a two rows nested record array with two regular fields (columns), and one nested field with two sub-fields.

The field structure of the nested record array is specified by the keyword argument `formats`. This argument only supports sequences of strings and other sequences. Each string defines the shape and type of a non-nested field. Each sequence contains the formats of the sub-fields of a nested field. Optionally, we can also pass an additional names keyword argument containing the names of fields and sub-fields:

```
>>> nra2 = array(
...     [(1, (0.5, 1.0), ('a1', 1j)), (2, (0, 0), ('a2', 1+1j))],
...     names=['id', 'pos', ('info', ['name', 'value'])],
...     formats=['Int64', '(2,)Float32', ['a2', 'Complex64']])
```

The names argument only supports lists of strings and 2-tuples. Each string defines the name of a non-nested field. Each 2-tuple contains the name of a nested field and a list describing the names of its sub-fields. If the names argument is not passed then all fields are automatically named (c1, c2 etc. on each nested field) so, in our first example, the fields will be named as `['c1', 'c2', ('c3', ['c1', 'c2'])]`.

Another way to specify the nested record array structure is to use the `descr` keyword argument:

```
>>> nra3 = array(
...     [(1, (0.5, 1.0), ('a1', 1j)), (2, (0, 0), ('a2', 1+1j))],
...     descr=[('id', 'Int64'), ('pos', '(2,)Float32'),
...             ('info', [('name', 'a2'), ('value', 'Complex64')])],
... )
>>> nra3
array(
  [(1L, array([ 0.5,  1. ], type=Float32), ('a1', 1j)),
   (2L, array([ 0.,  0.], type=Float32), ('a2', (1+0.10000000000000001j)))],
  descr=[('id', 'Int64'), ('pos', '(2,)Float32'), ('info', [('name', 'a2'),
   ('value', 'Complex64')])],
```

```
shape=2)
>>>
```

The `descr` argument is a list of 2-tuples, each of them describing a field. The first value in a tuple is the name of the field, while the second one is a description of its structure. If the second value is a string, it defines the format (shape and type) of a non-nested field. Else, it is a list of 2-tuples describing the sub-fields of a nested field.

As you can see, the `descr` list is a mix of the `names` and `formats` arguments. In fact, this argument is intended to replace `formats` and `names`, so they cannot be used at the same time.

Of course the structure of all three keyword arguments must match that of the elements (rows) in the `buffer` being stored.

Sometimes it is convenient to create nested arrays by processing a set of columns. In these cases the function `fromarrays` comes handy. This function works in a very similar way to the `array` function, but the passed buffer is a list of columns. For instance:

```
>>> from tables.nra import fromarrays
>>> nra = fromarrays([[1, 2], [4, 5]], descr=[('x', 'f8'),('y', 'f4')])
>>>
>>> nra
array(
  [(1.0, 4.0),
   (2.0, 5.0)],
  descr=[('x', 'f8'), ('y', 'f4')],
  shape=2)
```

Columns can be passed as nested arrays, what makes really straightforward to combine different nested arrays to get a new one, as you can see in the following examples:

```
>>> nra1 = fromarrays([nra, [7, 8]], descr=[('2D', [('x', 'f8'), ('y',
  'f4')]),
>>> ... ('z', 'f4')])
>>>
>>> nra1
array(
  [(1.0, 4.0), 7.0),
   ((2.0, 5.0), 8.0)],
  descr=[('2D', [('x', 'f8'), ('y', 'f4')]), ('z', 'f4')],
  shape=2)
>>>
>>> nra2 = fromarrays([nra1.field('2D/x'), nra1.field('z')], descr=[('x',
  'f8'),
>>> ('z', 'f4')])
>>>
>>> nra2
array(
  [(1.0, 7.0),
   (2.0, 8.0)],
  descr=[('x', 'f8'), ('z', 'f4')],
  shape=2)
```

Finally it's worth to mention a small group of utility functions in the `tables.nra.nestedrecords` module, `makeFormats`, `makeNames` and `makeDescr`, that can be useful to obtain the structure specification to be used with the `array` and `fromarrays` functions. Given a description list, `makeFormats` gets the corresponding formats

list. In the same way `makeNames` gets the names list. On the other hand the `descr` list can be obtained from `formats` and `names` lists using the `makeDescr` function. For example:

```
>>> from tables.nra.nestedrecords import makeDescr, makeFormats, makeNames
>>> descr=[('2D', [(('x', 'f8'), ('y', 'f4'))],('z', 'f4'))]
>>>
>>> formats = makeFormats(descr)
>>> formats
[['f8', 'f4'], 'f4']
>>> names = makeNames(descr)
>>> names
[('2D', [(('x', 'y'))], 'z')]
>>> d1 = makeDescr(formats, names)
>>> d1
[('2D', [(('x', 'f8'), ('y', 'f4'))], ('z', 'f4'))]
>>> # If no names are passed then they are automatically generated
>>> d2 = makeDescr(formats)
>>> d2
[('c1', [(('c1', 'f8'), ('c2', 'f4'))],('c2', 'f4'))]
```

C.2. NestedRecArray methods

To access the fields in the nested record array use the `field()` method:

```
>>> print nra2.field('id')
[1, 2]
>>>
```

The `field()` method accepts also names of sub-fields. It will consist of several field name components separated by the string `'/'`¹, for instance:

```
>>> print nra2.field('info/name')
['a1', 'a2']
>>>
```

Finally, the top level fields of the nested recarray can be accessed passing an integer argument to the `field()` method:

```
>>> print nra2.field(1)
[[ 0.5 1. ] [ 0.  0. ]]
>>>
```

An alternative to the `field()` method is the use of the `fields` attribute. It is intended mainly for interactive usage in the Python console. For example:

```
>>> nra2.fields.id
[1, 2]
>>> nra2.fields.info.fields.name
['a1', 'a2']
>>>
```

Rows of nested recarrays can be read using the typical index syntax. The rows are retrieved as `NestedRecord` objects:

¹This way of specifying the names of sub-fields is *very* specific to the implementation of `numarray` nested arrays of `PyTables`. Particularly, if you are using `NumPy` arrays, keep in mind that sub-fields in such arrays must be accessed one at a time, like this: `numpy_array['info']` `['name']`, and not like this: `numpy_array['info/name']`.

```
>>> print nra2[0]
(1L, array([ 0.5,  1. ], type=Float32), ('a1', 1j))
>>>
>>> nra2[0].__class__
<class tables.nra.nestedrecords.NestedRecord at 0x413cbb9c>
```

Slicing is also supported in the usual way:

```
>>> print nra2[0:2]
NestedRecArray[
(1L, array([ 0.5,  1. ], type=Float32), ('a1', 1j)),
(2L, array([ 0.,  0.], type=Float32), ('a2', (1+0.10000000000000001j)))
]
>>>
```

Another useful method is `asRecArray()`. It converts a nested array to a non-nested equivalent array.

This method creates a new vanilla `RecArray` instance equivalent to this one by flattening its fields. Only bottom-level fields included in the array. Sub-fields are named by pre-pending the names of their parent fields up to the top-level fields, using `'/'` as a separator. The data area of the array is copied into the new one. For example, calling `nra3.asRecArray()` would return the same array as calling:

```
>>> ra = numarray.records.array(
...     [(1, (0.5, 1.0), 'a1', 1j), (2, (0, 0), 'a2', 1+.1j)],
...     names=['id', 'pos', 'info/name', 'info/value'],
...     formats=['Int64', '(2,)Float32', 'a2', 'Complex64'])
```

Note that the shape of multidimensional fields is kept.

C.3. NestedRecord objects

Each element of the nested record array is a `NestedRecord`, i.e. a `Record` with support for nested datatypes. As said before, we can do indexing as usual:

```
>>> print nra1[0]
(1, (0.5, 1.0), ('a1', 1j))
>>>
```

Using `NestedRecord` objects is quite similar to using `Record` objects. To get the data of a field we use the `field()` method. As an argument to this method we pass a field name. Sub-field names can be passed in the way described for `NestedRecArray.field()`. The `fields` attribute is also present and works as it does in `NestedRecArray`.

Field data can be set with the `setField()` method. It takes two arguments, the field name and its value. Sub-field names can be passed as usual. Finally, the `asRecord()` method converts a nested record into a non-nested equivalent record.

Appendix D. Utilities

PyTables comes with a couple of utilities that make the life easier to the user. One is called `ptdump` and lets you see the contents of a PyTables file (or generic HDF5 file, if supported). The other one is named `ptrepack` that allows to (recursively) copy sub-hierarchies of objects present in a file into another one, changing, if desired, some of the filters applied to the leaves during the copy process.

Normally, these utilities will be installed somewhere in your `PATH` during the process of installation of the PyTables package, so that you can invoke them from any place in your file system after the installation has successfully finished.

D.1. ptdump

As has been said before, `ptdump` utility allows you look into the contents of your PyTables files. It lets you see not only the data but also the metadata (that is, the *structure* and additional information in the form of *attributes*).

D.1.1. Usage

For instructions on how to use it, just pass the `-h` flag to the command:

```
$ ptdump -h
```

to see the message usage:

```
usage: ptdump [-d] [-v] [-a] [-c] [-i] [-R start,stop,step] [-h]
      file[:nodepath]
      -d -- Dump data information on leaves
      -v -- Dump more metainformation on nodes
      -a -- Show attributes in nodes (only useful when -v or -d are active)
      -c -- Show info of columns in tables (only useful when -v or -d are
active)
      -i -- Show info of indexed columns (only useful when -v or -d are
active)
      -R RANGE -- Select a RANGE of rows in the form "start,stop,step"
      -h -- Print help on usage
```

D.1.2. A small tutorial on ptdump

Let's suppose that we want to know only the *structure* of a file. In order to do that, just don't pass any flag, just the file as parameter:

```
$ ptdump vllarray1.h5
vllarray1.h5 (File) ''
Last modif.: 'Mon Jan  8 16:21:25 2007'
Object Tree:
/ (RootGroup) ''
/vllarray1 (VLLArray(3L,), shuffle, zlib(1)) 'ragged array of ints'
/vllarray2 (VLLArray(3L,), shuffle, zlib(1)) 'ragged array of strings'
```

we can see that the file contains just a leaf object called `vllarray1`, that is an instance of `VLLArray`, has 4 rows, and two filters has been used in order to create it: `shuffle` and `zlib` (with a compression level of 1).

Let's say we want more meta-information. Just add the `-v` (verbose) flag:

```
$ ptdump -v vllarray1.h5
```

```

/ (RootGroup) ''
/vlarray1 (VLArray(3L,), shuffle, zlib(1)) 'ragged array of ints'
  atom = Int32Atom(shape=(), dflt=0)
  byteorder = 'little'
  nrows = 3
  flavor = 'numeric'
/vlarray2 (VLArray(3L,), shuffle, zlib(1)) 'ragged array of strings'
  atom = StringAtom(itemsizes=2, shape=(), dflt='')
  byteorder = 'irrelevant'
  nrows = 3
  flavor = 'python'

```

so we can see more info about the atoms that are the components of the `vlarray1` dataset, i.e. they are scalars of type `Int32` and with `Numeric` *flavor*.

If we want information about the attributes on the nodes, we must add the `-a` flag:

```

$ ptdump -va vlarray1.h5
/ (RootGroup) ''
  /._v_attrs (AttributeSet), 5 attributes:
    [CLASS := 'GROUP',
     PYTABLES_FORMAT_VERSION := '2.0',
     TITLE := '',
     VERSION := '1.0']
/vlarray1 (VLArray(3L,), shuffle, zlib(1)) 'ragged array of ints'
  atom = Int32Atom(shape=(), dflt=0)
  byteorder = 'little'
  nrows = 3
  flavor = 'numeric'
/vlarray1._v_attrs (AttributeSet), 4 attributes:
  [CLASS := 'VLARRAY',
   FLAVOR := 'numeric',
   TITLE := 'ragged array of ints',
   VERSION := '1.2']
/vlarray2 (VLArray(3L,), shuffle, zlib(1)) 'ragged array of strings'
  atom = StringAtom(itemsizes=2, shape=(), dflt='')
  byteorder = 'irrelevant'
  nrows = 3
  flavor = 'python'
/vlarray2._v_attrs (AttributeSet), 4 attributes:
  [CLASS := 'VLARRAY',
   FLAVOR := 'python',
   TITLE := 'ragged array of strings',
   VERSION := '1.2']

```

Let's have a look at the real data:

```

$ ptdump -d vlarray1.h5
/ (RootGroup) ''
/vlarray1 (VLArray(3L,), shuffle, zlib(1)) 'ragged array of ints'
  Data dump:
[0] [5 6]
[1] [5 6 7]
[2] [5 6 9 8]
/vlarray2 (VLArray(3L,), shuffle, zlib(1)) 'ragged array of strings'

```

```
Data dump:
[0] ['5', '66']
[1] ['5', '6', '77']
[2] ['5', '6', '9', '88']
```

we see here a data dump of the 4 rows in `vlarray1` object, in the form of a list. Because the object is a VLA, we see a different number of integers on each row.

Say that we are interested only on a specific *row range* of the `/vlarray1` object:

```
ptdump -R2,3 -d vlarray1.h5:/vlarray1
/vlarray1 (VLArray(3L,), shuffle, zlib(1)) 'ragged array of ints'
Data dump:
[2] [5 6 9 8]
```

Here, we have specified the range of rows between 2 and 4 (the upper limit excluded, as usual in Python). See how we have selected only the `/vlarray1` object for doing the dump (`vlarray1.h5:/vlarray1`).

Finally, you can mix several information at once:

```
$ ptdump -R2,3 -vad vlarray1.h5:/vlarray1
/vlarray1 (VLArray(3L,), shuffle, zlib(1)) 'ragged array of ints'
atom = Int32Atom(shape=(), dtype=0)
byteorder = 'little'
nrows = 3
flavor = 'numeric'
/vlarray1._v_attrs (AttributeSet), 4 attributes:
[CLASS := 'VLARRAY',
 FLAVOR := 'numeric',
 TITLE := 'ragged array of ints',
 VERSION := '1.2']
Data dump:
[2] [5 6 9 8]
```

D.2. ptrepack

This utility is a very powerful one and lets you copy any leaf, group or complete subtree into another file. During the copy process you are allowed to change the filter properties if you want so. Also, in the case of duplicated pathnames, you can decide if you want to overwrite already existing nodes on the destination file. Generally speaking, `ptrepack` can be useful in many situations, like replicating a subtree in another file, change the filters in objects and see how affect this to the compression degree or I/O performance, consolidating specific data in repositories or even *importing* generic HDF5 files and create true PyTables counterparts.

D.2.1. Usage

For instructions on how to use it, just pass the `-h` flag to the command:

```
$ ptrepack -h
```

to see the message usage:

```
usage: ptrepack [-h] [-v] [-o]
               [-R start,stop,step] [--non-recursive]
               [--dest-title=title] [--dont-copyuser-attrs] [--overwrite-nodes]
```

```

[--complevel=(0-9)] [--complib=lib] [--shuffle=(0|1)]
[--fletcher32=(0|1)] [--keep-source-filters] [--upgrade-flavors]
[--dont-regenerate-old-indexes]
sourcefile:sourcegroup destfile:destgroup
-h -- Print usage message.
-v -- Show more information.
-o -- Overwrite destination file.
-R RANGE -- Select a RANGE of rows (in the form "start,stop,step")
        during the copy of *all* the leaves.
--non-recursive -- Do not do a recursive copy. Default is to do it.
--dest-title=title -- Title for the new file (if not specified,
        the source is copied).
--dont-copy-userattrs -- Do not copy the user attrs (default is to do it)
--overwrite-nodes -- Overwrite destination nodes if they exist. Default
is
        to not overwrite them.
--complevel=(0-9) -- Set a compression level (0 for no compression, which
        is the default).
--complib=lib -- Set the compression library to be used during the copy.
        lib can be set to "zlib", "lzo" or "bzip2". Defaults to "zlib".
--shuffle=(0|1) -- Activate or not the shuffling filter (default is
active
        if complevel>0).
--fletcher32=(0|1) -- Whether to activate or not the fletcher32 filter
        (not active by default).
--keep-source-filters -- Use the original filters in source files. The
        default is not doing that if any of --complevel, --complib, --shuffle
        or --fletcher32 option is specified.
--upgrade-flavors -- When repacking PyTables 1.x files, the flavor of
        leaves will be unset. With this, such a leaves will be serialized
        as objects with the internal flavor ('numpy' for 2.x series).
--dont-regenerate-old-indexes -- Disable regenerating old indexes. The
        default is to regenerate old indexes as they are found.

```

D.2.2. A small tutorial on ptrepack

Imagine that we have ended the tutorial 1 (see the output of `examples/tutorial1-1.py`), and we want to copy our reduced data (i.e. those datasets that hangs from the `/column` group) to another file. First, let's remember the content of the `examples/tutorial1.h5`:

```

$ ptdump tutorial1.h5
tutorial1.h5 (File) 'Test file'
Last modif.: 'Mon Jan  8 16:30:30 2007'
Object Tree:
/ (RootGroup) 'Test file'
/columns (Group) 'Pressure and Name'
/columns/name (Array(3L,)) 'Name column selection'
/columns/pressure (Array(3L,)) 'Pressure column selection'
/detector (Group) 'Detector information'
/detector/readout (Table(10L,)) 'Readout example'

```

Now, copy the `/columns` to other non-existing file. That's easy:

```

$ ptrepack tutorial1.h5:/columns reduced.h5

```

That's all. Let's see the contents of the newly created `reduced.h5` file:

```
$ pt dump reduced.h5
reduced.h5 (File) ''
Last modif.: 'Mon Jan  8 16:31:31 2007'
Object Tree:
/ (RootGroup) ''
/name (Array(3L,)) 'Name column selection'
/pressure (Array(3L,)) 'Pressure column selection'
```

so, you have copied the children of `/columns` group into the *root* of the `reduced.h5` file.

Now, you suddenly realized that what you intended to do was to copy all the hierarchy, the group `/columns` itself included. You can do that by just specifying the destination group:

```
$ pt repack tutorial1.h5:/columns reduced.h5:/columns
$ pt dump reduced.h5
reduced.h5 (File) ''
Last modif.: 'Mon Jan  8 16:32:25 2007'
Object Tree:
/ (RootGroup) ''
/name (Array(3L,)) 'Name column selection'
/pressure (Array(3L,)) 'Pressure column selection'
/columns (Group) ''
/columns/name (Array(3L,)) 'Name column selection'
/columns/pressure (Array(3L,)) 'Pressure column selection'
```

OK. Much better. But you want to get rid of the existing nodes on the new file. You can achieve this by adding the `-o` flag:

```
$ pt repack -o tutorial1.h5:/columns reduced.h5:/columns
$ pt dump reduced.h5
reduced.h5 (File) ''
Last modif.: 'Mon Jan  8 16:33:08 2007'
Object Tree:
/ (RootGroup) ''
/columns (Group) ''
/columns/name (Array(3L,)) 'Name column selection'
/columns/pressure (Array(3L,)) 'Pressure column selection'
```

where you can see how the old contents of the `reduced.h5` file has been overwritten.

You can copy just one single node in the repacking operation and change its name in destination:

```
$ pt repack tutorial1.h5:/detector/readout reduced.h5:/rawdata
$ pt dump reduced.h5
reduced.h5 (File) ''
Last modif.: 'Mon Jan  8 16:33:59 2007'
Object Tree:
/ (RootGroup) ''
/rawdata (Table(10L,)) 'Readout example'
/columns (Group) ''
/columns/name (Array(3L,)) 'Name column selection'
/columns/pressure (Array(3L,)) 'Pressure column selection'
```

where the `/detector/readout` has been copied to `/rawdata` in destination.

We can change the filter properties as well:

```
$ ptrepack --complevel=1 tutorial1.h5:/detector/readout reduced.h5:/rawdata
Problems doing the copy from 'tutorial1.h5:/detector/readout' to 'reduced.h5:/rawdata'
The error was --> tables.exceptions.NodeError: destination group ``/`` already
  has a node named ``rawdata``; you may want to use the ``overwrite`` argument
The destination file looks like:
reduced.h5 (File) ''
Last modif.: 'Mon Jan  8 16:33:59 2007'
Object Tree:
/ (RootGroup) ''
/rawdata (Table(10L,)) 'Readout example'
/columns (Group) ''
/columns/name (Array(3L,)) 'Name column selection'
/columns/pressure (Array(3L,)) 'Pressure column selection'

Traceback (most recent call last):
  File "utils/ptrepack", line 3, in ?
    main()
  File ".../tables/scripts/ptrepack.py", line 349, in main
    stats = stats, start = start, stop = stop, step = step)
  File ".../tables/scripts/ptrepack.py", line 107, in copyLeaf
    raise RuntimeError, "Please check that the node names are not
    duplicated in destination, and if so, add the --overwrite-nodes flag
    if desired."
RuntimeError: Please check that the node names are not duplicated in
destination, and if so, add the --overwrite-nodes flag if desired.
```

Oops! We ran into problems: we forgot that the /rawdata pathname already existed in destination file. Let's add the --overwrite-nodes, as the verbose error suggested:

```
$ ptrepack --overwrite-nodes --complevel=1 tutorial1.h5:/detector/readout
reduced.h5:/rawdata
$ ptdump reduced.h5
reduced.h5 (File) ''
Last modif.: 'Mon Jan  8 16:36:54 2007'
Object Tree:
/ (RootGroup) ''
/rawdata (Table(10L,), shuffle, zlib(1)) 'Readout example'
/columns (Group) ''
/columns/name (Array(3L,)) 'Name column selection'
/columns/pressure (Array(3L,)) 'Pressure column selection'
```

you can check how the filter properties has been changed for the /rawdata table. Check as the other nodes still exists.

Finally, let's copy a *slice* of the readout table in origin to destination, under a new group called /slices and with the name, for example, aslice:

```
$ ptrepack -R1,8,3 tutorial1.h5:/detector/readout reduced.h5:/slices/aslice
$ ptdump reduced.h5
reduced.h5 (File) ''
Last modif.: 'Mon Jan  8 16:38:13 2007'
Object Tree:
/ (RootGroup) ''
```

```
/rawdata (Table(10L,), shuffle, zlib(1)) 'Readout example'
/columns (Group) ''
/columns/name (Array(3L,)) 'Name column selection'
/columns/pressure (Array(3L,)) 'Pressure column selection'
/slices (Group) ''
/slices/aslice (Table(3L,)) 'Readout example'
```

note how only 3 rows of the original readout table has been copied to the new aslice destination. Note as well how the previously inexistent slices group has been created in the same operation.

D.3. nctoh5

This tool is able to convert a file in [NetCDF](http://www.unidata.ucar.edu/packages/netcdf/) [http://www.unidata.ucar.edu/packages/netcdf/] format to a PyTables file (and hence, to a HDF5 file). However, for this to work, you will need the NetCDF interface for Python that comes with the excellent Scientific Python (see [17]) package. This script was initially contributed by Jeff Whitaker. It has been updated to support selectable filters from the command line and some other small improvements.

If you want other file formats to be converted to PyTables, have a look at the SciPy (see [18]) project (subpackage io), and look for different methods to import them into NumPy/Numeric/numarray objects. Following the SciPy documentation, you can read, among other formats, ASCII files (read_array), binary files in C or Fortran (fopen) and MATLAB (version 4, 5 or 6) files (loadmat). Once you have the content of your files as NumPy/Numeric/numarray objects, you can save them as regular (E)Arrays in PyTables files. Remember, if you end with a nice conversor, do not forget to contribute it back to the community. Thanks!

D.3.1. Usage

For instructions on how to use it, just pass the -h flag to the command:

```
$ nctoh5 -h
```

to see the message usage:

```
usage: nctoh5 [-h] [-v] [-o] [--complevel=(0-9)] [--complib=lib]
  [--shuffle=(0|1)] [--fletcher32=(0|1)] [--unpackshort=(0|1)]
  [--quantize=(0|1)] netcdffilename hdf5filename
-h -- Print usage message.
-v -- Show more information.
-o -- Overwrite destination file.
--complevel=(0-9) -- Set a compression level (0 for no compression, which
  is the default).
--complib=lib -- Set the compression library to be used during the copy.
  lib can be set to "zlib", "lzo" or "bzip2". Defaults to "zlib".
--shuffle=(0|1) -- Activate or not the shuffling filter (default is active
  if complevel>0).
--fletcher32=(0|1) -- Whether to activate or not the fletcher32 filter (not
  active by default).
--unpackshort=(0|1) -- unpack short integer variables to float variables
  using scale_factor and add_offset netCDF variable attributes
  (not active by default).
--quantize=(0|1) -- quantize data to improve compression using
  least_significant_digit netCDF variable attribute (not active by
  default).
  See http://www.cdc.noaa.gov/cdc/conventions/cdc_netcdf_standard.shtml
  for further explanation of what this attribute means.
```

If you have followed the small tutorial on the `ptrepack` utility (see [Section D.2](#)), you should easily realize what most of the different flags would mean.

Appendix E. PyTables File Format

PyTables has a powerful capability to deal with native HDF5 files created with another tools. However, there are situations where you may want to create truly native PyTables files with those tools while retaining fully compatibility with PyTables format. That is perfectly possible, and in this appendix is presented the format that you should endow to your own-generated files in order to get a fully PyTables compatible file.

We are going to describe the *2.0 version of PyTables file format* (introduced in PyTables version 2.0). As time goes by, some changes might be introduced (and documented here) in order to cope with new necessities. However, the changes will be carefully pondered so as to ensure backward compatibility whenever is possible.

A PyTables file is composed with arbitrarily large amounts of HDF5 groups (*Groups* in PyTables naming scheme) and datasets (*Leaves* in PyTables naming scheme). For groups, the only requirements are that they must have some *system attributes* available. By convention, system attributes in PyTables are written in upper case, and user attributes in lower case but this is not enforced by the software. In the case of datasets, besides the mandatory system attributes, some conditions are further needed in their storage layout, as well as in the datatypes used in there, as we will see shortly.

As a final remark, you can use any filter as you want to create a PyTables file, provided that the filter is a standard one in HDF5, like *zlib*, *shuffle* or *gzip* (although the last one can not be used from within PyTables to create a new file, datasets compressed with *gzip* can be read, because it is the HDF5 library which do the decompression transparently).

E.1. Mandatory attributes for a File

The `File` object is, in fact, an special HDF5 *group* structure that is *root* for the rest of the objects on the object tree. The next attributes are mandatory for the HDF5 *root group* structure in PyTables files:

CLASS

This attribute should always be set to 'GROUP' for group structures.

PYTABLES_FORMAT_VERSION

It represents the internal format version, and currently should be set to the '2.0' string.

TITLE

A string where the user can put some description on what is this group used for.

VERSION

Should contains the string '1.0'.

E.2. Mandatory attributes for a Group

The next attributes are mandatory for *group* structures:

CLASS

This attribute should always be set to 'GROUP' for group structures.

TITLE

A string where the user can put some description on what is this group used for.

VERSION

Should contains the string '1.0'.

E.3. Optional attributes for a Group

The next attributes are optional for *group* structures:

FILTERS

When present, this attribute contains the filter properties (a `Filters` instance, see section [Section 4.14.1](#)) that may be inherited by leaves or groups created immediately under this group. This is a packed 64-bit integer structure, where

- **byte 0** (the least-significant byte) is the compression level (`complevel`).
- **byte 1** is the compression library used (`complib`): 0 when irrelevant, 1 for Zlib, 2 for LZO and 3 for Bzip2.
- **byte 2** indicates which parameterless filters are enabled (`shuffle` and `fletcher32`): bit 0 is for *Shuffle* while bit 1 is for *Fletcher32*.
- other bytes are reserved for future use.

E.4. Mandatory attributes, storage layout and supported data types for Leaves

This depends on the kind of `Leaf`. The format for each type follows.

E.4.1. Table format

Mandatory attributes

The next attributes are mandatory for *table* structures:

CLASS

Must be set to 'TABLE'.

TITLE

A string where the user can put some description on what is this dataset used for.

VERSION

Should contain the string '2.6'.

FIELD_X_NAME

It contains the names of the different fields. The X means the number of the field, zero-based (beware, order do matter). You should add as many attributes of this kind as fields you have in your records.

FIELD_X_FILL

It contains the default values of the different fields. All the datatypes are supported natively, except for complex types that are currently serialized using Pickle. The X means the number of the field, zero-based (beware, order do matter). You should add as many attributes of this kind as fields you have in your records. These fields are meant for saving the default values persistently and their existence is optional.

NROWS

This should contain the number of *compound* data type entries in the dataset. It must be an *int* data type.

Storage Layout

A `Table` has a *dataspace* with a *1-dimensional chunked* layout.

Datatypes supported

The datatype of the elements (rows) of `Table` must be the `H5T_COMPOUND` *compound* data type, and each of these compound components must be built with only the next HDF5 data types *classes*:

H5T_BITFIELD

This class is used to represent the `Bool` type. Such a type must be build using a `H5T_NATIVE_B8` datatype, followed by a `HDF5 H5Tset_precision` call to set its precision to be just 1 bit.

H5T_INTEGER

This includes the next data types:

H5T_NATIVE_SCHAR

This represents a *signed char* C type, but it is effectively used to represent an `Int8` type.

H5T_NATIVE_UCHAR

This represents an *unsigned char* C type, but it is effectively used to represent an `UInt8` type.

H5T_NATIVE_SHORT

This represents a *short* C type, and it is effectively used to represent an `Int16` type.

H5T_NATIVE_USHORT

This represents an *unsigned short* C type, and it is effectively used to represent an `UInt16` type.

H5T_NATIVE_INT

This represents an *int* C type, and it is effectively used to represent an `Int32` type.

H5T_NATIVE_UINT

This represents an *unsigned int* C type, and it is effectively used to represent an `UInt32` type.

H5T_NATIVE_LONG

This represents a *long* C type, and it is effectively used to represent an `Int32` or an `Int64`, depending on whether you are running a 32-bit or 64-bit architecture.

H5T_NATIVE_ULONG

This represents an *unsigned long* C type, and it is effectively used to represent an `UInt32` or an `UInt64`, depending on whether you are running a 32-bit or 64-bit architecture.

H5T_NATIVE_LLONG

This represents a *long long* C type (`__int64`, if you are using a Windows system) and it is effectively used to represent an `Int64` type.

H5T_NATIVE_ULLONG

This represents an *unsigned long long* C type (beware: this type does not have a correspondence on Windows systems) and it is effectively used to represent an `UInt64` type.

H5T_FLOAT

This includes the next datatypes:

H5T_NATIVE_FLOAT

This represents a *float* C type and it is effectively used to represent an `Float32` type.

H5T_NATIVE_DOUBLE

This represents a *double* C type and it is effectively used to represent an `Float64` type.

H5T_TIME

This includes the next datatypes:

H5T_UNIX_D32

This represents a POSIX *time_t* C type and it is effectively used to represent a `'Time32'` aliasing type, which corresponds to an `Int32` type.

H5T_UNIX_D64

This represents a POSIX *struct timeval* C type and it is effectively used to represent a 'Time64' aliasing type, which corresponds to a Float64 type.

H5T_STRING

The datatype used to describe strings in PyTables is H5T_C_S1 (i.e. a *string* C type) followed with a call to the HDF5 `H5Tset_size()` function to set their length.

H5T_ARRAY

This allows the construction of homogeneous, multidimensional arrays, so that you can include such objects in compound records. The types supported as elements of H5T_ARRAY data types are the ones described above. Currently, PyTables does not support nested H5T_ARRAY types.

H5T_COMPOUND

This allows the support for datatypes that are compounds of compounds (this is also known as *nested types* along this manual).

This support can also be used for defining complex numbers. Its format is described below:

The H5T_COMPOUND type class contains two members. Both members must have the H5T_FLOAT atomic datatype class. The name of the first member should be "r" and represents the real part. The name of the second member should be "i" and represents the imaginary part. The *precision* property of both of the H5T_FLOAT members must be either 32 significant bits (e.g. H5T_NATIVE_FLOAT) or 64 significant bits (e.g. H5T_NATIVE_DOUBLE). They represent Complex32 and Complex64 types respectively.

E.4.2. Array format

Mandatory attributes

The next attributes are mandatory for *array* structures:

CLASS

Must be set to 'ARRAY'.

TITLE

A string where the user can put some description on what is this dataset used for.

VERSION

Should contain the string '2.3'.

Storage Layout

An *Array* has a *dataspace* with a *N-dimensional contiguous* layout (if you prefer a *chunked* layout see *EArray* below).

Datatypes supported

The elements of *Array* must have either HDF5 *atomic* data types or a *compound* data type representing a complex number. The atomic data types can currently be one of the next HDF5 data type *classes*: H5T_BITFIELD, H5T_INTEGER, H5T_FLOAT and H5T_STRING. The H5T_TIME class is also supported for reading existing *Array* objects, but not for creating them. See the Table format description in [Section E.4.1](#) for more info about these types.

In addition to the HDF5 atomic data types, the Array format supports complex numbers with the H5T_COMPOUND data type class. See the Table format description in [Section E.4.1](#) for more info about this special type.

You should note that H5T_ARRAY class datatypes are not allowed in Array objects.

E.4.3. CArray format

Mandatory attributes

The next attributes are mandatory for *CArray* structures:

CLASS

Must be set to 'CARRAY'.

TITLE

A string where the user can put some description on what is this dataset used for.

VERSION

Should contain the string '1.0'.

Storage Layout

An *CArray* has a *dataspace* with a *N-dimensional chunked* layout.

Datatypes supported

The elements of *CArray* must have either HDF5 *atomic* data types or a *compound* data type representing a complex number. The atomic data types can currently be one of the next HDF5 data type *classes*: H5T_BITFIELD, H5T_INTEGER, H5T_FLOAT and H5T_STRING. The H5T_TIME class is also supported for reading existing *CArray* objects, but not for creating them. See the Table format description in [Section E.4.1](#) for more info about these types.

In addition to the HDF5 atomic data types, the *CArray* format supports complex numbers with the H5T_COMPOUND data type class. See the Table format description in [Section E.4.1](#) for more info about this special type.

You should note that H5T_ARRAY class datatypes are not allowed yet in Array objects.

E.4.4. EArray format

Mandatory attributes

The next attributes are mandatory for *earray* structures:

CLASS

Must be set to 'EARRAY'.

EXTDIM

(Integer) Must be set to the extendable dimension. Only one extendable dimension is supported right now.

TITLE

A string where the user can put some description on what is this dataset used for.

VERSION

Should contain the string '1.3'.

Storage Layout

An *EArray* has a *dataspace* with a *N-dimensional chunked* layout.

Datatypes supported

The elements of `EArray` are allowed to have the same data types as for the elements in the `Array` format. They can be one of the HDF5 *atomic* data type *classes*: `H5T_BITFIELD`, `H5T_INTEGER`, `H5T_FLOAT`, `H5T_TIME` or `H5T_STRING`, see the `Table` format description in [Section E.4.1](#) for more info about these types. They can also be a `H5T_COMPOUND` datatype representing a complex number, see the `Table` format description in [Section E.4.1](#).

You should note that `H5T_ARRAY` class data types are not allowed in `EArray` objects.

E.4.5. `VLArray` format

Mandatory attributes

The next attributes are mandatory for `vlarray` structures:

CLASS

Must be set to `'VLARRAY'`.

PSEUDOATOM

This is used so as to specify the kind of pseudo-atom (see [Section E.4.5](#)) for the `VLArray`. It can take the values `'vlstring'`, `'vlunicode'` or `'object'`. If your atom is not a pseudo-atom then you should not specify it.

TITLE

A string where the user can put some description on what is this dataset used for.

VERSION

Should contain the string `'1.3'`.

Storage Layout

An `VLArray` has a *dataspace* with a *1-dimensional chunked* layout.

Data types supported

The data type of the elements (rows) of `VLArray` objects must be the `H5T_VLEN` *variable-length* (or `VL` for short) datatype, and the base datatype specified for the `VL` datatype can be of any *atomic* HDF5 datatype that is listed in the `Table` format description [Section E.4.1](#). That includes the classes:

- `H5T_BITFIELD`
- `H5T_INTEGER`
- `H5T_FLOAT`
- `H5T_TIME`
- `H5T_STRING`
- `H5T_ARRAY`

They can also be a `H5T_COMPOUND` data type representing a complex number, see the `Table` format description in [Section E.4.1](#) for a detailed description.

You should note that this does not include another `VL` datatype, or a compound datatype that does not fit the description of a complex number. Note as well that, for `object` and `vlstring` pseudo-atoms, the base for the `VL` datatype is always a `H5T_NATIVE_UCHAR` (`H5T_NATIVE_UINT` for `vlunicode`). That means that the complete row entry in the dataset has to be used in order to fully serialize the object or the variable length string.

E.5. Optional attributes for Leaves

The next attributes are optional for *leaves*:

FLAVOR

This is meant to provide the information about the kind of object kept in the `Leaf`, i.e. when the dataset is read, it will be converted to the indicated flavor. It can take one the next string values:

"numpy"

Read data (record arrays, arrays, records, scalars) will be returned as NumPy objects.

"numarray"

Read data will be returned as numarray objects.

"numeric"

Read data will be returned as Numeric objects.

"python"

Read data will be returned as Python lists, tuples or scalars.

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