A skip list container class in Python

An alternative to balanced trees

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Abstract

Describes a module in the Python programming language that implements a “skip list”, a data structure for storing and retrieving sorted elements in $O(\log n)$ time.

This publication is available in Web form and also as a PDF document. Please forward any comments to john@nmt.edu.

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1 http://www.nmt.edu/~shipman/soft/pyskip/
2 http://www.nmt.edu/~shipman/soft/pyskip/pyskip.pdf
1. Why skip lists?

A skip list is a data structure for representing an ordered set of objects so that insertion and retrieval take minimal time.

This ingenious data structure was described in:


Like balanced tree structures, skip lists support search whose time complexity varies as the log of the number of elements. However, compared to 2-3 trees and other tree-oriented techniques, skip lists require much simpler algorithms and much less storage overhead within the data structure.

There is also a probabilistic element in the construction of a skip list that makes it an interesting example of the use of randomness in algorithms.

2. An implementation of skip lists in Python

The Python module pyskip.py is an implementation of Pugh's skip list data structure.

2.1. Definitions

It is necessary to define a few terms before we explore the use and construction of skip lists.

2.1.1. The child domain

A child object is any object that you want to store in a skip list. Typically all child objects are the same type, but there's nothing preventing you from using more than one child object type in a skip list, if you need to.

By child domain we mean the type (or types) of child objects.
2.1.2. The key domain

Since skip lists are designed to allow rapid lookup of random child objects, and because child objects are kept in sorted order, we must define how two child objects are to be compared so they can be placed in order.

By key we mean the value used to compare two child objects. Depending on the application, the key may be a value stored inside the child object, or the key may be the child object itself, or a value derived from the child object.

For example, you might have a set of FishLicense objects representing fish licenses, each containing a unique ten-character license number. You might use a skip list to hold this set of objects, and designate the license number as the key. Then you could rapidly retrieve fish licenses by number.

We use the term key domain to mean the set of possible key values.

2.1.3. Stability

If duplicates are allowed, equal members will be kept in their order of insertion. For example, if you insert three equal elements a, b, and c into a skip list in that order, if you then iterate over the members of the list, those three elements will be returned in the same order.

This property of a container class is called stability. The term comes from sorting theory: a sort that does not perturb the order of elements with equal keys is called a stable sort.

2.2. Creating a Python skip list

Typically you will import the Python skip list module as:

```python
import pyskip
```

To create a new, empty skip list, use this syntax:

```python
pyskip.SkipList ( keyFun=None, cmpFun=None, allowDups=0, count=1000000 )
```

where the arguments have these values:

**keyFun**

This argument is a function that takes a child argument and returns the corresponding key value. The default value, `None`, causes SkipList to treat the child elements themselves as keys.

Suppose, for example, that you are building a skip list full of HockeyTeam objects, and each object has an attribute .teamName that contains the team's name as a string. You could write that key function as:

```python
def teamKey(hockeyTeam):
    return hockeyTeam.teamName
```

Then to create the skip list you'd say something like:

```python
skip = SkipList ( keyFun=teamKey )
```

and the objects would be ordered alphabetically by team name.

To make the ordering case-insensitive, you could write the key function like this, uppercasing the keys for comparison:
def teamKey(hockeyTeam):
    return hockeyTeam.teamName.upper()

cmpFun
A function that defines the ordering relation on values in the list. The default value, None, means to use the usual Python cmp() function to compare values. You may supply your own function, adhering to the usual convention for this function: when called to compare two elements \( a \) and \( b \), \( \text{cmp}(a, b) \) should return:

- a negative value, if \( a \) should precede \( b \);
- zero, if \( a \) and \( b \) are considered equal; or
- a positive value if \( a \) should follow \( b \).

allowDups
If you use allowDups=1, you will be allowed to store multiple objects in the skip list even though they compare equal to each other. If, however, you set allowDups=0, the skip list object will raise an exception if you attempt to insert an element into the list that is equal to an existing element, according to the cmpFun function (or its default).

count
The purpose of this argument is to tune performance with very large skip lists. With the default value for count equal to a million, the skip list should provide access in logarithmic time for up to about a million elements. If you plan to store more than that, set count to an estimated number of elements.

If the number of elements in the skip list greatly exceeds the count value, it will still function correctly, but the performance may suffer.

2.3. Methods and attributes of the SkipList object

These attributes and methods are defined on a SkipList object:

.\text{insert} ( \text{c} )
Inserts a new child element \( c \) into the skip list.

If you created the skip list with allowDups=0 and the new element has the same key as an existing member of the list, this method will raise a KeyError exception.

If duplicates are allowed (the allowDups=1 option to the constructor), and the new element's key duplicates one or more already in the list, the new child will be added in sequence after the other duplicates. This makes the ordering stable; see Section 2.1.3, “Stability” (p. 3).

.\text{delete} ( \text{k} )
Deletes the first or only element whose key is equal to \( k \), and returns the deleted child element (or None if there are no matching elements).

If duplicates are allowed and there are multiple elements equal to \( e \), only the first one will be deleted.

.\text{match} ( \text{k} )
Returns the first or only object whose key equals \( k \). If there are no such objects, this method raises a KeyError exception.

.\text{find} ( \text{k} )
Searches for the first element whose key is equal to or greater than \( k \), and returns an iterator that iterates over all those elements.
.first()
If there are any elements in the skip list, this method returns the first element. If the skip list is empty, it raises KeyError.

.__len__(self)
This special method defines the meaning of the ordinary len() function when applied to a SkipList. It returns the number of child elements in the list.

.__iter__(self)
Returns an iterator object that can be used to iterate over the elements of the skip list. You can have multiple independent iterators pointing at the same skip list, and each will move independently of the others. This allows constructs like:

```python
for i in s: ...
```
where s is a SkipList object. Such a loop will set i to each child value from s in turn.

.__contains__ ( self, k )
Defines the meaning of the Python “in” and “not in” operators in the usual way for container classes.

If s is a SkipList, the expression k in s returns true if and only if k is equal to at least one member of s. Similarly, the expression k not in s returns true iff k is not equal to any member of s.

.__delitem__ ( self, k )
Same as .delete(k).

.__getitem__ ( self, k )
This method defines the usual meaning of s[k], where s is a SkipList. It has the same semantics as s.match[k].

This syntax is useful mainly for skip lists that don’t allow duplicates. If you need to retrieve multiple members that all compare equal, use the .find() method.

.nSearches
Read-only; equal to the number of times the list has been searched. Each call to the .match(), .find(), or .delete() method is counted as one search.

.nCompares
Read-only; equal to the number of times two elements have been compared with the cmpFun function (or its default).

Statistically, the ratio of .nCompares to .nSearches should be proportional to the log of the number of elements. For analysis, see Pugh’s original article.

3. Internals of SkipList
Before examining the actual code, let’s discuss the data structure and some other implementation considerations.

3.1. The skip list data structure
To implement the functionality of this ordered set container, we could just keep all the objects in an ordinary linked list. However, searching a linked list has a time complexity that varies linearly with the number of elements. To be competitive with balanced tree approaches such as 2-3 trees, we need to be able to search in log time.
Pugh's idea was to set up a number of linked lists, numbered starting at 0, such that:

- Every object is in list 0, ordered from lowest to highest key.
- List $i$ visits a subset of the objects in list $(i-1)$, but still in order by key.

In practice, when each new element is inserted, it is always added to list 0, and it is also added to a random number of higher-numbered lists, where each higher level is less likely.

With this structure, the higher-numbered linked lists are more and more sparse. Therefore, the algorithm for searching a skip list is:

1. Search the highest-numbered list until you find either the desired item or one that is beyond the desired item.
2. If the desired item is not in the highest-numbered list, back up to the preceding item, move down one list, and search that list.
3. Repeat until either the desired item is found or it is not found in list 0.

So the search begins by "skipping" rapidly down the list using the highest-level, sparse linked list, then zeroes in on the desired item by moving down to denser and denser linked lists.

Here is an example of a small skip list containing some short character strings in lexical order. This list has a maximum of 8 levels:

```
This picture shows five strings, "a", "c", two copies of "d", and "f".

The field names refer to members of the SkipList object. The item labeled .__heads contains the heads of all the lists. Each list terminates with a pointer to the item labeled .__terminator. Field .__maxLevels is the maximum number of linked lists (8 in the figure), and .__nLevels is the number of lists that are currently in use.

3.2. Skip list algorithms

Now that we've seen the static structure of a skip list, let's move on to the basic operations: inserting a new child, finding a child, and deleting a child.

3.2.1. The insertion algorithm

Here is a figure showing the insertion of a new element into a skip list.
The dashed lines show links that need to be updated.

### 3.2.1.1. The insertion cut list

In the figure above, note the structure labeled “insertion-cut-list” is a list of pointers to the predecessors of the new element at each level. The first element of this list points to the item preceding the insertion in the level-0 list, which visits every element of the list. The second element in the insertion cut list points to the predecessor in the level-1 list, and so on.

This *insertion cut list* shows the position of a child element relative to each of the stacked linked lists. It tells us which links have to be repaired to include the newly inserted child.

We call it the insertion cut list to distinguish it from the *search cut list*; for the reasons behind this distinction, see Section 3.2.2, “The search algorithm” (p. 8).

### 3.2.1.2. Picking a level count

When we insert a new element, how many of the stacked linked lists should contain the new element? Pugh recommended using a random process based on a probability value \( \rho \), where the number of levels used for each new element is given by this table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>( \text{level} )</th>
<th>( 1 - \rho )</th>
<th>( \rho (1 - \rho) )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 - ( \rho )</td>
<td>( \rho (1 - \rho) )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>( \rho (1 - \rho) )</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

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For example, for \( p = 0.25 \), an element has a \( \frac{3}{4} \) probability of being linked into only level 0, a \( \frac{3}{16} \) probability of being in levels 0 and 1, a \( \frac{3}{64} \) probability of being in levels 0 through 2, and so forth.

The algorithm for deciding the number of levels is straightforward. For \( p = 0.25 \), it's like throwing a 4-sided die. If it comes up 1, 2, or 3, use one level. If it comes up 4, roll again. If the second roll comes up 1, 2, or 3, use two levels. If it comes up 4, roll again, and so forth.

We will incorporate the “dirty hack” described in Pugh’s article, limiting the growth in the total number of levels in use to one per insertion. This prevents the pathological case where a series of “bad rolls” might create many new levels at once for only a single insertion. Otherwise we might get silly behavior like a 6-level skip list to store ten elements.

### 3.2.2. The search algorithm

The process of searching for a given key value is nearly identical to the process of building the insert cut list (see Section 3.2.1.1, “The insertion cut list” (p. 7)).

The only difference between the search cut list and the insert cut list is in the case where we have elements with duplicate keys (that is, when the constructor was called with \texttt{allowDups=1}).

If we’re inserting a new child whose key is a duplicate of a key already in the list, we want the new child to go \textit{after} any duplicates. This is required for stability; see Section 2.1.3, “Stability” (p. 3).

However, if we’re searching for an element (or deleting an element—see Section 3.2.3, “Deleting a child” (p. 8)), we want to position before any duplicate elements.

### 3.2.3. Deleting a child

Deletion of a child starts by finding the search cut list. For a discussion of the search cut list, see Section 3.2.2, “The search algorithm” (p. 8).

The search cut list contains all the predecessors whose links need to be updated when a child element is deleted. To delete a child, we work through the search cut list, repairing each predecessor link to point to the successor of the deleted child.

### 3.3. Iterators: toward a more Pythonic class

Starting with version 2.2, the Python language now supports a powerful new concept called the \textit{iterator}.

An iterator is just an object that keeps track of a position within some sequence. The only requirement is that it have a \texttt{.next()} method that, when called:

- If there are any elements left in the sequence, the method returns the next element in the sequence, and the iterator also advances its own internal state to point to the following item, if there is one.
- When the sequence is exhausted, the method raises the \texttt{StopIteration} exception to signal that no more elements remain.

Some container classes return themselves as the result of the \texttt{.__iter__()} special method, so that the required \texttt{.next()} method uses some internal state stored inside the container class instance. However, the drawback to this approach is that you can’t have two or more iterators pointing at different places in the sequence at the same time.
When we want to return a pointer at a position within a SkipList object, we can do so by pointing at a _SkipItem object. When we need to advance through the rest of the sequence, we can just follow the forward links in that object. This means there can exist two or more iterators walking through a skip list at the same time.

3.4. Classes in this module

When considering the class structure of the application, two classes are obvious:

• The user sees only the SkipList class, a classic container object.

• It makes sense to create a class to hold all the information for one node of the skip list data structure. This class is called _SkipItem; the single underbar in its name signifies that it is private to the module.

However, we need a third class to represent the iterators that are returned by the .find() method in the SkipList class, and by that class’s special __iter__() method.

So we define a third class, _SkipListIterator, that defines a .next() method. This object keeps track of its position in the list by pointing to a _SkipItem.

How does this iterator know when it has reached the end of the skip list? It can’t compare the _SkipItem to __terminator, which is private to the SkipList class. Even if we made that attribute public, a _SkipItem object doesn’t contain a reference to its containing SkipList.

The solution is to stipulate that the __terminator object’s forward links all point to itself. That way, a _SkipListIterator instance can detect when it is pointing at the terminator.

There is one more complication with this technique. What happens if someone has a copy of an iterator that points to a _SkipItem that has been deleted from its containing SkipList?

In order that the _SkipItem object correctly detects this erroneous situation, it must know when it represents a deleted element.

Therefore, we stipulate that in a _SkipItem instance the level-0 forward link must be set to None when it is deleted. That way, the .next() method will know to signal an error and not attempt to chase its forward link.

4. The source code

The code for pyskip.py follows in literate programming style. The author is indebted to his colleague Dr. Allan M. Stavely for the concept of lightweight literate programming.

Development used the Cleanroom software development methodology.

4.1. Declarations

We’ll start with a rudimentary documentation string for the module, pointing back to the online documentation:

```python
pyskip.py

"""pyskip.py: A container class for ordered sets in Python.
```

http://www.nmt.edu/~shipman/soft/litprog/

http://www.nmt.edu/~shipman/soft/clean/
Next we’ll need to import one of the Python standard modules, the random number generator:

```python
import random
```

### 4.2. Verification functions

The Cleanroom methodology relies on “verification functions” to describe notational shorthand. Here are all the verification functions used in this project, in alphabetical order.

All verification function names contain a hyphen, so you can distinguish them from program objects.

#### 4.2.1. children-are-ordered

```python
# children-are-ordered ( x, y ) ==
# if self.allowDups ->
#   cmp ( key-of ( x ), key-of ( y ) ) <= 0
# else ->
#   cmp ( key-of ( x ), key-of ( y ) ) < 0
#--
# Similar to the keys-are-ordered predicate, but operates on child objects.
```

#### 4.2.2. insertion-cut-list

```python
# insertion-cut-list ( key ) ==
# a list L of size self.__maxLevels, such that each element L[i] equals insertion-point ( i, key )
#--
# An "$insertion cut list" is a list of the _SkipItem objects that must be updated when a new elements is inserted. Element [i] of the cut list points to the element whose forward pointer has to be repaired in the (i)th list.
```

#### 4.2.3. insertion-point

```python
# insertion-point ( level, key ) ==
# the last element E in nth-list ( self.__heads, level ) such that insertion-precedes ( E, key ) is true
#--
```
# This describes the predecessor _SkipItem whose forward link
# must be updated when a new item with key (key) is inserted.

## 4.2.4. insertion-point-after

```python
# insertion-point-after ( level, key, searchItem ) ==
# the last element E in nth-list(searchItem,level) such that
# insertion-precedes(E, key) is true
#--
# Just like insertion-point(), except that it starts at an
# arbitrary _SkipItem instead of self.__heads.
```

## 4.2.5. insertion-precedes

```python
# insertion-precedes ( skipItem, key ) ==
# if skipItem is self.__terminator -> F
# else if skipItem is self.__heads -> T
# else ->
#    keys-are-ordered ( key-of ( skipItem's child ), key )
#--
# This predicate is true when (skipItem) should be before
# an item with key (key) in the level-0 list.
```

## 4.2.6. key-of

```python
# key-of ( child ) ==
#    if not self.keyFunction ->
#    child
#    else ->
#    self.keyFunction ( child )
```

## 4.2.7. keys-are-ordered

```python
# keys-are-ordered ( x, y ) ==
#    if self.allowDups ->
#       cmp ( x, y ) <= 0
#    else ->
#       cmp ( x, y ) < 0
#--
# This is the ordering relation used in the key domain.
# - If we don't allow duplicates, then each key must be
#   strictly less than its successor.
# - If we allow duplicates, then two successive keys can
#   be equal.
4.2.8. nth-list

```python
# nth-list (root, n) ==
#    the linked list of _SkipItem objects rooted at (root) and
#    using _SkipItem.links[n] as the next-item method
#--
#    This define is used to describe positions in the linked list
#    of objects at one level of the structure. In particular,
#    nth-list (self.__heads, n)
#    describes the entire skip list at level (n).
```

4.2.9. search-cut-list

```python
# search-cut-list (key) ==
#    a list L of size self.__maxLevels such that
#    L[i] := search-point (i, key)
#--
#    Like insert-cut-list(), but used for .delete() and .find()
#    operations.
```

4.2.10. search-point

```python
# search-point (level, key) ==
#    the last _SkipItem E in nth-list(self.__heads, level) such that
#    search-precedes(E, key) is true
#--
#    The predecessor whose forward link must be updated when
#    the item with key (key) is deleted. Also used in
#    .find().
```

4.2.11. search-point-after

```python
# search-point-after (level, key, searchItem) ==
#    the last element E in nth-list(searchItem, level) such that
#    search-precedes(E, key) is true
#--
#    Like search-point except that the search starts at some
#    given item rather than at self.__heads.
```

4.2.12. search-precedes

```python
# search-precedes (skipItem, key) ==
```
# if skip-compare ( skipItem, key ) < 0 -> true
# else -> false
#--
# A predicate, true when the child in skipItem is before the
# key (key).

4.2.13. skip-compare

```py
# *----------------------------------------------------------------
# skip-compare ( skipItem, key ) ==
# if skipItem is self.__terminator -> 1
# else -> cmp ( key-of ( skipItem's child ), key )
#--
# Like cmp(), but we want to avoid trying to extract a key
# from self.__terminator, because it doesn't have one. If
# skipItem is the terminator, we return 1 because the terminator
# goes after all other elements.
# *----------------------------------------------------------------
```

4.3. The _SkipItem internal class

Before we discuss the main SkipList class, we need a helper object to hold the structural bookkeeping information associated with one element of the skip list.

This helper object doesn't have much to it:

- Its .child attribute is a pointer to the child object at that position in the skip list.
- Its .links attribute is a list containing the one or more forward links connecting this element of the skip list to the following element (or pointing to the .__terminator if this element is the last one).

Here, then, is the _SkipItem class:

```py
# - - - - - c l a s s _ S k i p I t e m - - - - -
class _SkipItem:
    """Represents one child element of a SkipList.

    Exports:
    _SkipItem ( child, nLevels ):
        [ (child is a child object) and
        (nLevels is an integer >= 1) ->
        return a new _SkipItem with that child object and
        (nLevels) forward links, each set to None ]
    .child: [ as passed to constructor, read-only ]
    .links:
        [ if self is an active SkipList element ->
        a list of nLevels elements, read-write, containing
        pointers to a _SkipItem instance
        else ->
        a list of at least 1 whose first element is None ]
    """
```
The final line uses the Python convention that an expression of the form “$[x]*n$”, where $n$ is an integer, gives you a list containing $n$ copies of $x$.

4.4. The **_SkipListIterator** class

The **_SkipListIterator** class is used to represent an iterator that walks down a skip list. It has one piece of internal state: a pointer to the **_SkipItem** instance that marks the next item, or to the terminator instance if there are no more items.

It has only three methods, a constructor and the **__iter__()** and **.next()** methods required for Python iterators. The **__iter__()** method just returns the instance; without this method, you can’t use this object in constructs like “for $k$ in ...”.

```python
# - - - - - c l a s s _ S k i p L i s t I t e r a t o r - - - - -
class _SkipListIterator:
    """Represents an active iterator over a SkipList object.

    Exports:
    _SkipListIterator ( skipItem ):
        [ skipItem is a _SkipItem ->
          return a new iterator whose next item is skipItem,
          or which is at end of list if skipItem's forward
          link points to itself ]
    .skipItem:
        [ if self is exhausted ->
          a terminator _SkipItem
        else ->
          a _SkipItem containing the value that will be returned
          next time ]
    __iter__(self): [ returns self ]
    .next():
        [ if self.skipItem's level-0 link is None ->
          raise ValueError
        else if self.skipItem.links[0] == self.skipItem ->
          raise StopIteration
        else ->
          self.skipItem := self.skipItem.links[0]
          return self.skipItem.child ] # *Before* advancing!
    """
```

# - - - _ S k i p L i s t I t e r a t o r . _ _ i n i t _ _ - - -
def __init__(self, skipItem):
    """Constructor for _SkipListIterator""
    self.skipItem = skipItem

# - - - _ S k i p L i s t I t e r a t o r . n e x t - - -

def next(self):
    """Return the next child item and advance""
    if self.skipItem.links[0] is None:
        raise ValueError, "Iterator points to a deleted item."
    elif self.skipItem.links[0] is self.skipItem:
        raise StopIteration
    else:
        result = self.skipItem.child
        self.skipItem = self.skipItem.links[0]
        return result

In order for a _SkipListIterator object to qualify as an iterator, and be usable in contexts such as "for k in S", the object must have a special __iter__() method that returns the iterator.

# - - - _ S k i p L i s t I t e r a t o r . _ _ i t e r _ _ - - -

def __iter__(self):
    """Returns the iterator itself.""
    return self

4.5. The SkipList class

Now we turn to the actual SkipList class. First, the external interface with intended functions:
raise KeyError
else ->
    self := self with e added as a new child object ]
.delete(k):
    [ k is in the key domain ->
      if self contains any child objects with keys equal to k ->
        self := self with the first-inserted such child object deleted
      return that child object
    else ->
      return None ]
.match(k):
    [ k is in the key domain ->
      if self contains any child objects whose keys equal k ->
        return the first such child object
      else -> raise KeyError ]
.find(k):
    [ k is in the key domain ->
      if self contains any child objects whose keys are >= k ->
        return an iterator that will iterate over all
        child objects whose keys are >= k, in order ]
._len_(self):
    [ return the number of child objects in self ]
._iter_(self):
    [ return an iterator that will iterate over all the
      child objects in self in order ]
._contains_ (self, k):
    [ if self contains any child objects whose keys equal k ->
      return 1
    else -> return 0 ]
._delitem_ (self, k): [ same as self.delete(k) ]
._getitem_ (self, k): [ same as self.match(k) ]
.nSearches: [INVARIANT: Number of searches performed ]
.nCompares: [INVARIANT: Number of child pairs compared ]

Next, we declare a manifest constant for the Pugh's $p$:

```python
##
# Manifest constants
##
NEW_LEVEL_PROBABILITY  = 0.25 # The 'p' of Pugh's article
```

Next, we need to declare the class's internal state and invariants.

```python
#===============================================
# State and invariants
#===============================================
# .keyFun:     [ as passed to constructor, read-only ]
# .cmpFun:     [ as passed to constructor, read-only ]
# .allowDups:  [ as passed to constructor, read-only ]
# .__maxLevels:  
#     [ 1 + ceiling ( log (base 4) of count argument to constructor ) ]
```
4.6. SkipList.__init__()

Here’s the SkipList constructor. First we make local copies of all the constructor arguments except count, and set up the invariants for several internal state values:

```python
# - - - S k i p L i s t . __ i n i t _ _ - - -

def __init__ ( self, keyFun=None, cmpFun=None, allowDups=0,
            count=1000000 ):
    """Constructor for SkipList""

        #-- 1 --
        # self.keyFun = keyFun
        # self.cmpFun = cmpFun
        # self.allowDups = allowDups
        # self.nSearches = 0
        # self.nCompares = 0
        # self.__nLevels = 1
        # self.__nItems = 0

Then we compute self.__maxLevels based on the count argument. Based on our $p$ value of 0.25, we’d expect to need two levels when we have about four elements, three levels when we have sixteen, and so forth. To be generous, we’ll use one plus the ceiling of the log (base 4) of count. See Section 4.7, “SkipList.__estimateLevels()” (p. 18).

```python
#-- 2 --
# [ self.__maxLevels := (number of bits required to
#    represent count, rounded to the next even number)/2+1 ]
self.__maxLevels = self.__estimateLevels ( count )
```
Next we have to set up the __heads and __terminator elements. They are both special instances of the _SkipItem class; in the former, all links point to the latter, and in the latter, all links point to itself.

```python
#-- 3 --
# [ self.__terminator := a new _SkipItem object whose
#   links all point to itself
# self.__heads := a new _SkipItem object whose links
#   all point to that new terminator _SkipItem object ]
self.__terminator = _SkipItem ( None, self.__maxLevels )
self.__heads = _SkipItem ( None, self.__maxLevels )
for i in xrange ( self.__maxLevels ):
    self.__terminator.links[i] = self.__terminator
    self.__heads.links[i] = self.__terminator
```

### 4.7. SkipList.__estimateLevels()

Here’s the __estimateLevels() function used in the constructor:

```python
#-- 1 --
result = 1
#-- 2 --
# [ result += k, where k is the the number of bits required
#   to represent n, rounded to the next higher even number ]
while n > 0:
    result += 1
    n >>= 2
#-- 3 --
return result
```

In the while loop, we count the number of times we have to shift n to the right two bits before it goes to zero, effectively computing the ceiling of the log base 4 of n. This gives us a result of 1 for \( n=0 \), 2 for \( n \) in the range \([1,4)\), 3 for \( n \) in the range \([4,16)\), 4 for \( n \) in the range \([16,256)\), and so on.

### 4.8. SkipList.insert()

The insertion of a new child element is depicted above; see Section 3.1, “The skip list data structure” (p. 5).
def insert ( self, child ):  
    """Insert a new child element into the skip list."""

To link in a new child element, once we have decided how many levels of links it will use, we must insert it into each of those linked lists. So we define the idea of an insertion cut list: a list of all the predecessors whose forward links must be updated.

The main complication here is that we must implement stability, that is, objects with equal keys must be ordered by insertion time. For example, if we have five objects all with a key value of 5, the first one must be the first inserted, and the last one must be the last inserted.

So, when computing the insertion cut list, we must find the point in the child sequence after the last child with the same key. Refer to Section 4.2, “Verification functions” (p. 10) for the verification functions used here, and also see Section 4.9, “SkipList.__keyOf()” (p. 20).

The next step is to build the insertion cut list. If there any elements with the same key as the new element, the insertion cut list depends on whether duplicates are allowed or not. We call the point of insertion the cut point, and the cut list is the list of links that cross the cut point.

If duplicates aren’t allowed, the cut point is positioned before any duplicate elements, so that when we check for duplicates, we check the new key against the successor of the cut point.

But if duplicates are allowed, due to the stability constraint, the cut point should be after any duplicates. See Section 4.8, “SkipList.insert()” (p. 18) for a discussion of stability.

Now that we have nextItem pointing just after the cut point, we can check for duplicates when they’re not allowed. See Section 4.13, “SkipList.__compareItemKey()” (p. 23).

Having eliminated the only error case, now we can proceed with the actual insertion of the new element. See Section 4.14, “SkipList.__insertItem()” (p. 24).
The next step maintains the invariant on \_\_nItems, that is, we keep track of the number of items in the list.

### 4.9. SkipList\_\_keyOf()

This function finds the child's key. If there is no key function, use the child itself as the key.

```python
#-- 5 --
# [ if cutList is insertion-cut-list ( key ) ->
#   self := self with a new _SkipItem containing (child)
#   inserted after the items pointed at by the
#   the first n elements of cutList, where
#   n is in [1,self.__maxLevels] ]
self.__insertItem ( child, cutList )

The first step is to build a list of pointers to self.__heads, one for each possible level.

```python
#-- 1 --
# [ result := a list of size self.__maxLevels such that
#   each element is self.__heads
```
Next, we search all the levels currently in use from the top down. We find the cut point at each level, then for the next level we start at the predecessor of that cut point. The routine to find each cut point is Section 4.11, “SkipList.__insertPoint()” (p. 21).

4.11.SkipList.__insertPoint()

This routine searches down one level's linked list until it reaches the point where a new key is to be inserted.

First we find the predecessor and successor of the starting point.

Next, we move down the n°-level list until we reach the point where the insertion will go.
4.12. SkipList.__insertionPrecedes()

This routine tests whether a given _SkipItem is before a given key, assuming that we're performing an insertion of a child with that key value.

```python
#-- 2 --
# [ if nextItem is not self.__heads ->
#   if not insertion-precedes(nextItem, key) -> I
#   else ->
#     prevItem := last item E at or after nextItem
#     in the (level)th list such that
#     insertion-precedes(E, key) is true
#   nextItem := <anything> ]
while self.__insertionPrecedes( nextItem, key ):
  #-- 2 body --
  # [ prevItem := nextItem
  #   nextItem := the successor of nextItem in the
  #   (level)th list ]
  prevItem = nextItem
  nextItem = nextItem.links[level]

Finally, we return the predecessor to that location.

#-- 3 --
return prevItem
```

The terminator never precedes anything:

```python
#-- 1 --
if skipItem is self.__terminator:
  return 0
```

Next, we compare the key of the _SkipItem to the new key. See Section 4.13, “SkipList.__compareItemKey()” (p. 23).

```python
#-- 2 --
# [ comparison := cmp ( key-of ( skipItem's child ), key ) ]
comparison = self.__compareItemKey( skipItem, key )
```
Whether we want to place the new key before or after duplicates depends on whether the skip list allows duplicates.

```python
#-- 3 --
#
# Note: if duplicates are disallowed, and there is an item that
# duplicates (target), we want to point before the duplicate
# item so that the .insert() method will see it and fail.
# If duplicates are allowed, though, we want to point after
# all matching items so that the list order will reflect
# the insertion order.
#
# [ if self.allowDups ->
#   if comparison <= 0 -> return 1
#   else -> return 0
# else ->
#   if comparison < 0 -> return 1
#   else -> return 0 ]
if self.allowDups:
    return ( comparison <= 0 )
else:
    return ( comparison < 0 )
```

### 4.13. SkipList.__compareItemKey()

This small routine compares two keys, one from a _SkipItem and one in the key domain.

```python
# - - - S k i p L i s t . _ _ c o m p a r e I t e m K e y - - -
def __compareItemKey ( self, skipItem, keyB ):
    """Compare the key from a _SkipItem to a key in the key domain.
    [ return cmp ( key-of ( skipItem's child ), keyB ) ]"
    
    First we get the key from skipItem; see Section 4.9, “SkipList.__keyOf()” (p. 20).

    #-- 1 --
    # [ keyA := key-of ( skipItem's child ) ]
    keyA = self.__keyOf ( skipItem.child )

    We increment self.nCompares, the count of the number of comparison operations. Then we use
    Python's built-in cmp() function to do the comparison, returning its result as our result.

    #-- 2 --
    self.nCompares = self.nCompares + 1
    return cmp ( keyA, keyB )
```
4.14. SkipList.__insertItem()

The responsibility of this method is to build a new _SkipItem to hold the newly inserted child, and then link it into one or more of the linked lists.

```python
#--- SkipList.__insertItem ---

def __insertItem ( self, child, cutList ):
    """
    [ cutList is insertion-cut-list(key-of(child)) ->
      self := self with a new _SkipItem, with child=(child),
      inserted after the items pointed at by the
      first n levels of cutList, where n is in the
      range [1,self.__maxLevels] ]
    """

First, using the random number generator, we decide into how many levels we should link the new item. If number of levels picked exceeds the current number of levels, we must adjust the value of self.__nLevels to maintain the invariant that this variable tracks the maximum number of levels actually in use so far. See Section 4.15, “SkipList.__pickLevel()” (p. 25).

```python
#-- 1 --
# [ levels := a random integer in [1,self.__maxLevels]
#   self.__nLevels := max ( self.__nLevels,
#                          that random integer ) ]

levels = self.__pickLevel ( )
```

Then we construct the actual _SkipItem containing the new child. See Section 4.3, “The _SkipItem internal class” (p. 13).

```python
#-- 2 --
# [ newItem := a new _SkipItem with child=(child) and
#   (levels) forward links all set to None ]
newItem = _SkipItem ( child, levels )
```

Finally, the __insertRelink() method takes care of linking the item into the correct number of linked lists; see Section 4.16, “SkipList.__insertRelink()” (p. 25).

```python
#-- 3 --
# [ (cutList is insertion-cut-list(key-of(child))) and
#   (newItem is a _SkipItem with at least (levels) links) ->
#   self := self with newItem linked into the first (levels)
#   lists, just after the element pointed at by the
#   corresponding element of cutList ]
self.__insertRelink ( levels, cutList, newItem )
```
4.15. SkipList.__pickLevel()

This method implements the algorithm for probabilistically deciding how many levels to use for linking in a new skip list entry. For a discussion of this algorithm, see Section 3.1, “The skip list data structure” (p. 5).

```python
# -- - - Sk i p L i s t . _ _ p i c k L e v e l - - -

def __pickLevel ( self ):
    """Into how many levels should an insertion be linked?
    [ self.__nLevels := max ( self.__nLevels,
        a randomly chosen integer in [1,self.__maxLevels] )
    return that same integer ]"

Here is what Pugh calls the “dirty hack”: we will never add more than one level to a skip list per insertion. For the details, see Section 3.1, “The skip list data structure” (p. 5).

```python
#-- 1 --
result = 1
maxNewLevel = min ( self.__nLevels + 1, self.__maxLevels )

Roll the dice, figuratively. The random.random() function returns a real in the interval [0,1), and NEW_LEVEL_PROBABILITY is what Pugh calls $p$. The process is limited by the previously computed maxNewLevel. For details on the random module, see the Python library reference under “Miscellaneous Services.”

```python
#-- 2 --
# [ maxNewLevel >= result ->
#   result := a randomly chosen integer in the range
#   [result,maxNewLevel] ]
while ( ( random.random() <= self.NEW_LEVEL_PROBABILITY ) and
        ( result < maxNewLevel ) ):
    result = result + 1

Maintain the invariant on self.__nLevels (a running max of the number of levels ever used in the skip list), and return the generated result.

```python
#-- 3 --
self.__nLevels = max ( self.__nLevels, result )

#-- 4 --
return result
```

4.16. SkipList.__insertRelink()

This routine takes care of repairing all the linked lists that must contain the newly created _SkipItem. In general, insertion into a linked lists has this form, where $P$ is the predecessor, $S$ is the successor, and $N$ is the new block:

[^http://docs.python.org/lib/lib.html](http://docs.python.org/lib/lib.html)
So all we need to do is execute this relinking operation once for each level that contains the new _SkipItem. See also the diagram of this relinking in Section 3.1, “The skip list data structure” (p. 5).

```python
def __insertRelink ( self, levels, cutList, newItem ):
    """Insert the new _SkipItem into all its linked lists.
    [ (cutList is insertion-cut-list(key-of(child))) and
      (newItem is a _SkipItem with child=(child) and
       at least (levels) links) ->
      self := self with newItem linked into the first (levels)
      lists, just after the element pointed at by the
      corresponding element of cutList ]
    """

    #-- 1 --
    for i in xrange(levels):
        #-- 1 loop --
        # [ i is an integer in [0,levels) ->
        #   newItem.links[i] := cutList[i].links[i]
        #   cutList[i].links[i] := newItem ]

        #-- 1.1 --
        # [ i is an integer in [0,levels) ->
        #   prevItem := the item pointed at by cutList[i]
        #   succItem := the (i)th link from the item
        #   pointed at by cutList[i] ]
        prevItem = cutList[i]
        succItem = prevItem.links[i]

        #-- 1.2 --
        # [ i is an integer in [0,levels) ->
        #   newItem := newItem with its (i)th link
        #   pointing to succItem
        #   prevItem := prevItem with its (i)th link
        #   pointing to newItem ]
        newItem.links[i] = succItem
        prevItem.links[i] = newItem
```

### 4.17. SkipList.delete()

Deletion, like insertion, also uses the idea of a cut list, that is, a list of all the predecessors whose links must be repaired to leave out the deleted item.

However, deletion uses a slightly different concept of the cut list, the search cut list. The only difference comes when the skip list allows duplicate keys. When we’re inserting a child with a duplicate key, we want it to go after the other children with that key, to guarantee stability.
For deletion and searching, however, we want the cut list to point before the first of any values whose keys are equal to the key we’re deleting or searching for.

```python
# -- -- SkipList.delete -- --

def delete(self, key):
    """Delete the first or only child with a given key value."
    
    First we find the search cut list for the given key. We also set local variables prevItem and nextItem to point to the predecessor and successor of the cut point at level 0. See Section 4.18, “SkipList.__searchCutList()” (p. 28).

    #-- 1 --
    # [ cutList := search-cut-list ( key )
    # prevItem := first element of search-cut-list ( key )
    # nextItem := successor to first element of
    # search-cut-list ( key ) ]
    cutList = self.__searchCutList(key)
    prevItem = cutList[0]
    nextItem = prevItem.links[0]

    If the cut point is before the terminator, or the element after the cut point does not have the key value we’re looking for, we’re done, and we return None to signify failure to delete anything. See Section 4.13, “SkipList.__compareItemKey()” (p. 23).

    #-- 2 --
    # [ if (nextItem is self.__terminator) or
    # ( cmp ( key-of ( nextItem's child ), key ) ) > 0 ) ->
    #   return None
    # else -> I ]
    if ( (nextItem is self.__terminator) or (self.__compareItemKey(nextItem, key) > 0) ):
        return None

    We’ve found the item to be deleted, and nextItem points to it. Relink all the lists that point at that item so that the predecessor at that level in the cut list points at nextItem’s successor at that level.

    #-- 3 --
    # [ self := self modified so that for all I in
    #   [0,self.__nLevels), if the skipItem pointed to by
    #   cutList[I] has an (I)th link that points to
    #   nextItem, make that link point where nextItem's
    #   (I)th link points ]
    for i in xrange(self.__nLevels):
        #-- 3 body --
        # [ if the _SkipItem pointed to by cutList[i] has an
        #   (i)th link that points to nextItem ->
        #   that link is made to point where nextItem's (i)th
        #   link points ]
        prevItem = cutList[i]
        if prevItem.links[i] is nextItem:
            prevItem.links[i] = nextItem.links[i]
```

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Finally, we must adjust \( \_\_nItems \) to reflect the deletion of one child, and return the deleted child value.

We must also set the level-0 link in the deleted \_SkipItem to None, for reasons discussed in Section 3.4, "Classes in this module" (p. 9).

4.18. SkipList.__searchCutList()

This method returns the "search cut list", a list of the predecessors of a given key at each level of the skip list.

```python
#-- 4 --
self._nItems = self._nItems - 1
nextItem.links[0] = None
return nextItem.child
```

```python
#--- SkipList.__searchCutList ---#

def __searchCutList ( self, key ):
    """Find predecessors of the item with a given key.
    [ key is in self's key domain ->
    return search-cut-list ( key ) ]
    ""

We start by building a list called result containing pointers to the head element, and also point searchItem at the head element.

```python
#-- 1 --
# [ result := a list of size self._maxLevels such that
#    each element is self._heads
#    searchItem := self._heads ]
result = [self._heads] * self._maxLevels
searchItem = self._heads
```

This loop is similar to the one in Section 4.10, "SkipList.__insertCutList()" (p. 20). It starts at the highest level currently in use and searches forward to find the predecessor at that level. Then it backs up and goes down a level until it reaches level 0. See Section 4.19, "SkipList.__searchPoint()" (p. 29).

```python
#-- 2 --
# [ if search-precedes ( searchItem, key ) ->
#    result := result modified so that for I in
#    [0, self._nLevels),
#    result[I] := search-point(I, key)
#    searchItem := <anything> ]
for i in xrange ( self._nLevels-1, -1, -1 ):
    #-- 2 body --
    # [ if search-precedes ( searchItem, key ) ->
    #    result[i] := search-point-after(i, key, searchItem)
    #    searchItem := <same as previous line> ]
```
searchItem = self.__searchPoint ( searchItem, i, key )
result[i] = searchItem

Finally, we increment the total count of searches and return the resulting cut-list.

```python
#-- 3 --
self.nSearches = self.nSearches + 1
return result
```

### 4.19. SkipList.__searchPoint()

This routine locates the predecessor of the first item after a given point that is before the given key value.

```python
#-- 1 --
def __searchPoint ( self, searchItem, level, key ):
    """Search one level of the skip list for a given key.

    [ ( level is in [0,self.__maxLevels ) ) and
      ( search-precedes ( searchItem, key ) ) ->
      return search-point-after ( level, key, searchItem ) ]
    """

    prevItem = searchItem
    nextItem = searchItem.links[level]
    
    while self.__searchPrecedes ( nextItem, key ):
        prevItem = nextItem
        nextItem = nextItem.links[level]
```

First we set the local variables `prevItem` and `nextItem` to the item where we start, and its successor, respectively.

```python
#-- 2 --
if nextItem is not self.__heads ->
if search-precedes ( nextItem, key ) ->
    prevItem := last item E in nth-list(nextItem, level)
    such that search-precedes(E, key) is true
    nextItem := <anything>
else -> I ]
while self.__searchPrecedes ( nextItem, key ):
    prevItem = nextItem
    nextItem = nextItem.links[level]
```

Finally, we return the predecessor item.

```python
#-- 3 --
return prevItem
```
4.20. SkipList.__searchPrecedes()

This is a predicate used to test whether a given _SkipItem precedes the item with a given key.

```python
# - - - S k i p L i s t . __ s e a r c h P r e c e d e s - - -

def __searchPrecedes ( self, skipItem, key ):
    """Does this item precede the item with a given key?
    [ ( skipItem is a _SkipItem ) and
      ( key is in self's key domain) ->
       if search-precedes ( skipItem, key ) ->
        return 1
      else ->
        return 0 ]
    """

Eliminate the case where skipItem is the terminator, because that item never precedes anything. Then use the .__compareItemKey() method to do the actual comparison.

```python
#-- 1 --
if skipItem is self.__terminator:
    return 0
#-- 2 --
# [ if cmp ( key-of(skipItem's child), key ) < 0 ->
#     return 1
# else ->
#     return 0 ]
if self.__compareItemKey ( skipItem, key ) < 0:
    return 1
else:
    return 0
```

4.21. SkipList.match()

The .match() method is used to search for a specific, matching item. If there are multiple matching items, by definition it returns the first. This means we use the search cut list to locate the matching item, rather than the insert cut list. See Section 3.2.2, “The search algorithm” (p. 8).

```python
# - - - S k i p L i s t . m a t c h - - -

def match ( self, key ):
    """Return the first or only child with the given key.
    """

If there is a matching item, the level-0 element of the search cut list will precede it; see Section 4.2.9, “search-cut-list” (p. 12). So we could call the .__searchCutList() method and use element [0] of the returned list.

However, for efficiency reasons, there is a simplified version of .__searchCutList() that doesn't build up the entire cut list, but instead just finds the level-0 predecessor: see Section 4.22, “SkipList.__searchCutItem” (p. 31).
If the user is looking for a child that isn’t there, searchItem will point either at the terminator, or at a _SkipItem with a different key. In either of those cases, raise the KeyError exception. Otherwise, return the child item. See Section 4.13, “SkipList.__compareItemKey()” (p. 23).

4.22. SkipList.__searchCutItem

The logic here is basically the same as in __searchCutList(), but the caller only needs to know the level-0 element of the search cut list. So, to avoid a lot of extra storage allocator calls, we don’t build the entire search cut list. For more detailed commentary, see Section 4.18, “SkipList.__searchCutList()” (p. 28).
```python
self.nSearches = self.nSearches + 1
return searchItem
```

### 4.23. SkipList.find()

Unlike .match(), the .find() method returns not a child but a generator that visits all children at or after a given key value.

```python
#-- 1 --
# [ searchItem := search-point ( 0, key ).links[0] ]
prevItem = self.__searchCutItem ( key )
searchItem = prevItem.links[0]
```

At this point, all we need to do is to pass the selected _SkipItem to the _SkipListIterator constructor, and return the new iterator to the caller. See Section 4.4, “The _SkipListIterator class” (p. 14).

```python
#-- 2 --
return _SkipListIterator ( searchItem )
```

### 4.24. SkipList.__len__()

The special method __len__() is called when the len() function is applied to a _SkipItem. It returns the value of the internal __nItems.

```python
#-- 3 --
def __len__ ( self ):
    """Returns the number of child elements."""
    return self.__nItems
```

### 4.25. SkipList.__iter__()

The special __iter__() method returns an iterator that walks the entire skip list in order. The logic is trivial: we pass the successor of the level-0 list head to the _SkipListIterator constructor. See Section 4.4, “The _SkipListIterator class” (p. 14).

```python
#-- 4 --
def __iter__ ( self ):
    return _SkipListIterator ( self )
```
def __iter__ ( self ):
    """Iterator for the entire list""
    return _SkipListIterator ( self.__heads.links[0] )

4.26.SkipList.__contains__()

This special method is called when the user uses the Python “in” or “not in” operators to test
whether a given key value matches any of the child objects in the skip list.

# - - - S k i p L i s t . _ _ c o n t a i n s _ _ - - -

def __contains__ ( self, key ):
    """Does self contain the given key?""

First we call the .match() method to tell us whether there's a matching element. Then we convert the
return values of that method to a Boolean.

#- - - -
try:
  child = self.match ( key )
  return 1
except KeyError:
  return 0

4.27.SkipList.__delitem__()

The __delitem__() method is another special method that is called when the user applies the Python
deel statement to one element of a skip list. It's really the same thing as the .delete() method, except
the caller doesn't want the deleted item.

In the case where there are multiple children with the same key, it's not obvious whether a user would
expect to delete all of them. We arbitrary say it will delete only one. If one wishes to delete them all,
one can always write a loop that calls .delete() until it returns a None to signify that no elements
were deleted.

# - - - S k i p L i s t . _ _ d e l i t e m _ _ - - -

def __delitem__ ( self, key ):
    """Delete the first or only item with a given key.""
    self.delete ( key )

4.28.SkipList.__getitem__()

This special method name is called when a user retrieves an element from a skiplist using the syntax
"s[k]". Note that a KeyError exception will be raised if no child objects have a matching key.

# - - - S k i p L i s t . _ _ g e t i t e m _ _ - - -

def __getitem__ ( self, key ):
5. skiptest: A small test driver

Here is a small test script that exercises the module.

```
#!/usr/bin/env python
#================================================================
# skiptest: Test driver for pyskip.py
# Do not edit this file. It is extracted automatically from
# the documentation:
# http://www.nmt.edu/~shipman/soft/pyskip/
#---------------------------------------------------------------
import pyskip

# - - - - - m a i n
def main():
    '''Main program.
    '''
    #-
    # Test 1: Build a small list with no duplicates and print it.
    #-
    print "=== Test 1, no duplicates ==="
    s=pyskip.SkipList()
    s.insert("foo")
    s.insert("bar")
    s.insert('klarn')
    s.insert('zoop')
    s.insert('aab')

    for k in s:
        print k,
    print

    print "=== len() test, should be 5 ==="
    print len(s)

    print "=== The list starting at 'foo':" 
    for k in s.find("foo"):
        print k,
    print

    print "=== Match test, should find zoop:" 
    print s.match("zoop")
    print "=== Match test, should print `Pass`:"
    try:
        result = s.match("no-such")
    print "Fail, it found", result
```
except KeyError:
    print "Pass"

print "=== Test of __getitem__ ===
print "s['foo'] contains", s['foo']

print "=== Test of __contains__: should print True, then False"
print ('foo' in s), ('no-such' in s)

#--
# Test 2: Test stability with duplicates.
#--
print "\n=== Test 2, duplicates, key function: Equal keys should"
print "== have ascending serial numbers; serial #1 was deleted."

s=pyskip.SkipList(allowDups=1, keyFun=Serial.key)
s.insert(Serial("a"))
s.insert(Serial("x"))
s.insert(Serial("x"))
s.insert(Serial("x"))
s.insert(Serial("x"))
s.insert(Serial("x"))
s.insert(Serial("x"))
s.insert(Serial("x"))
s.insert(Serial("a"))
s.insert(Serial("a"))
s.insert(Serial("a"))
s.insert(Serial("x"))
s.delete("a")
for k in s:
    print k,
print
# - - - - - c l a s s S e r i a l
class Serial:
    """A class that adds a unique serial number to each instance."
    """
    serialNo = 0

    def __init__ ( self, child ):
        """Constructor"
        self.child = child
        Serial.serialNo += 1
        self.serial = Serial.serialNo

    def __str__ ( self ):
        """String convert function"
        return "%s [#{%d}] % (self.child, self.serial)

    def key ( self ):
        """Key extractor function"
        return self.child
6. Performance testing

To test whether the implementation gives $O(\log n)$ performance, script `bigotest` generates random floating-point values, then searches for a given number of them, and accumulates statistics on the number of comparisons per search.

Here is the raw data. For each $n$, five runs were made. The last column shows the mean of the five runs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>$n$</th>
<th>Samples</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$1e4$</td>
<td>23.4 26.5 26.2 26.1 25.1</td>
<td>25.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1e5$</td>
<td>31.8 30.7 32.7 33.4 31.0</td>
<td>31.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1e6$</td>
<td>41.0 39.7 36.4 36.1 38.3</td>
<td>38.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$2e6$</td>
<td>39.3 38.3 40.1 43.1 40.4</td>
<td>40.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$4e6$</td>
<td>41.0 41.2 42.8 41.4 44.9</td>
<td>42.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here is a plot of the mean number of comparisons as a function of the common log of $n$.

Here is the `bigotest` script.
#!/usr/bin/env python
#================================================================
# bigotest: Test that pyskip has O(log n) time complexity
#--
# Command line arguments:
#  bigotest [N]
# where N is the number of floats to generate, default DEFAULT_N.
#----------------------------------------------------------------
# - - - - - I m p o r t s
from __future__ import print_function
import sys
import pyskip
import random
#
# - - - - - M a n i f e s t c o n s t a n t s
DEFAULT_N = 10**6        # Default number of items
N_SAMPLES = 100           # How many lookups we try
#
# - - - - - m a i n
def main():
    """Main program.

    [ sys.stdout += statistics on number of elements and number
      of compares per lookup on a set of HOW_MANY random floats ]
    """
    #-- 1
    # [ if there is one positive float argument ->
    #   n := int(that argument)
    # else if there are no arguments->
    #   n := DEFAULT_N
    # else ->
    #   sys.stderr += error message
    #   stop execution ]
    n = checkArgs()
    #-- 2
    # [ skip := a new pyskip.SkipList instance that allows duplicates
    #     and has no key or compare function and is optimized for at
    #     least n elements ]
    skip = pyskip.SkipList(allowDups=1, count=n*4)
    #-- 3
    # [ skip += HOW_MANY uniform random floats ]
    # sampleList := N_SAMPLES of those random floats ]
    for k in range(n-N_SAMPLES):
        skip.insert(random.random())
    sampleList = []
for k in range(N_SAMPLES):
    sample = random.random()
    sampleList.append(sample)
    skip.insert(sample)

#-- 4
# [ sys.stdout += statistics on the number of compares required
to look up each element of sampleList once ]
oldCompares = skip.nCompares
for sample in sampleList:
    if sample not in skip:
        print("Failed to find value {0:.5f}!".format(sample))
    delta = skip.nCompares - oldCompares
    print("Average of {0} random lookups out of {1} total "
          "elements:".format(N_SAMPLES, len(skip)))
    print("{0:.1f} compares per lookup.".format(float(delta)/N_SAMPLES))

#-- 1
argList = sys.argv[1:]

#-- 2
if len(argList) == 0:
    return DEFAULT_N

#-- 3
try:
    n = int(float(argList[0]))
except ValueError:
    fatal("The argument must be a positive integer.""

#-- 4
if n < N_SAMPLES:
    fatal("The argument must be at least {0}.".format(N_SAMPLES))

    return n

#-- 5
def fatal(*L):
'Print a message and terminate.

    [ L is a list of strings ->
      sys.stderr += concatenated elements of L
      stop execution ]

    print(''.join(L), file=sys.stderr)
    sys.exit(1)

# - - - r e p o r t

def report(skip, label):
    '''Display accumulated statistics.
    ...
    print("=== {0}".format(label))
    print("   {0:9d} elements.".format(len(skip)))

# - - - - - E p i l o g u e

if __name__ == "__main__":
    main()