Ant System*

Jason Brownlee
jasonb@CleverAlgorithms.com
The Clever Algorithms Project
http://www.CleverAlgorithms.com

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Abstract

The Clever Algorithms project aims to describe a large number of Artificial Intelligence algorithms in a complete, consistent, and centralized manner, to improve their general accessibility. The project makes use of a standardized algorithm description template that uses well-defined topics that motivate the collection of specific and useful information about each algorithm described. This report describes the Ant System algorithm.

Keywords: `Clever, Algorithms, Description, Optimization, Ant, System`

1 Introduction

The Clever Algorithms project aims to describe a large number of algorithms from the fields of Computational Intelligence, Biologically Inspired Computation, and Metaheuristics in a complete, consistent and centralized manner [3]. The project requires all algorithms to be described using a standardized template that includes a fixed number of sections, each of which is motivated by the presentation of specific information about the technique [4]. This report describes the Ant System algorithm.

2 Name

Ant System, AS, Ant Cycle

3 Taxonomy

The Ant System algorithm is an example of an Ant Colony Optimization method from the field of Swarm Intelligence, Metaheuristics and Computational Intelligence. Ant System was originally the term used to refer to a range of Ant based algorithms, where the specific algorithm implementation was referred to as Ant Cycle. The so-called Ant Cycle algorithm is now canonically referred to as Ant System. The Ant System algorithm the baseline Ant Colony Optimization method for popular extensions such as Elite Ant System, Rank-based Ant System, and Ant Colony System.

4 Inspiration

The Ant system algorithm is inspired by the foraging behavior of ants, specifically the pheromone communication between ants regarding a good path between the colony and a food source in an environment. This mechanism is called stigmergy.

5 Metaphor

Ants initially wander randomly around their environment. Once food is located an ant will begin laying down pheromone in the environment. Numerous trips between the food and the colony are performed and if the same route is followed that leads to food then additional pheromone is laid down. Pheromone decays in the environment, so that older paths are less likely to be followed. Other ants may discover the same path to the food and in turn may follow it and also lay down pheromone. A positive feedback process routes more and more ants to productive paths that are in turn further refined through use.

6 Strategy

The objective of the strategy is to exploit historic and heuristic information to construct candidate solutions and fold the information learned from constructing solutions into the history. Solutions are constructed one discrete piece at a time in a probabilistic step-wise manner. The probability of selecting a component is determined by the heuristic contribution of the component to the overall cost of the solution and the quality of solutions from which the component has historically known to have been included. History is updated proportional to the quality of candidate solutions and is uniformly deceased ensuring the most recent and useful information is retained.

7 Procedure

Algorithm 1 provides a pseudo-code listing of the main Ant System algorithm for minimizing a cost function. The pheromone update process is described by a single equation that combines the contributions of all candidate solutions with a decay coefficient to determine the new pheromone value, as follows:

$$\tau_{i,j} \leftarrow (1-\rho) \times \tau_{i,j} + \sum_{k=1}^{m} \Delta_{i,j}^{k} \tag{1}$$

where $\tau_{i,j}$ represents the pheromone for the component (graph edge) (i,j), ρ is the decay factor, m is the number of ants, and $\sum_{k=1}^{m} \Delta_{i,j}^{k}$ is the sum of $\frac{1}{S_{cost}}$ (maximizing solution cost) for those solutions that include component i,j. The pseudo code listing shows this equation as an equivalent as a two step process of decay followed by update for simplicity.

The probabilistic step-wise construction of solution makes use of both history (pheromone) and problem-specific heuristic information to incrementally construction a solution piece-by-piece. Each component can only be selected if it has not already been chosen (for most combinatorial problems), and for those components that can be selected from given the current component i, their probability for selection is defined as:

$$P_{i,j} \leftarrow \frac{\tau_{i,j}^{\alpha} \times \eta_{i,j}^{\beta}}{\sum_{k=1}^{c} \tau_{i,k}^{\alpha} \times \eta_{i,k}^{\beta}} \tag{2}$$

where $\tau_{i,j}$ is the maximizing contribution to the overall score of selecting the component (such as $\frac{1.0}{distance_{i,j}}$ for the Traveling Salesman Problem), α is the heuristic coefficient, $\eta_{i,j}$ is the pheromone value for the component, β is the history coefficient, and c is the set of usable components.

Algorithm 1: Pseudo Code for the Ant System algorithm.

```
Input: ProblemSize, Population_size, m, ρ, α, β
Output: P_best
P_best ← CreateHeuristicSolution(ProblemSize);
Pbest_cost ← Cost(S_h);
Pheromone ← InitializePheromone(Pbest_cost);
while ¬StopCondition() do
    Candidates ← 0;
    for i = 1 to m do
        S_i ← ProbabilisticStepwiseConstruction(Pheromone, ProblemSize, α, β);
        Si_cost ← Cost(S_i);
        if Si_cost ≤ Pbest_cost then
            Pbest_cost ← Si_cost;
            P_best ← S_i;
        end
        Candidates ← S_i;
    end
    DecayPheromone(Pheromone, ρ);
    foreach S_i ∈ Candidates do
        UpdatePheromone(Pheromone, S_i, Si_cost);
    end
end
return P_best;
```

8 Heuristics

- The Ant Systems algorithm was designed for use with combinatorial problems such as the TSP, knapsack problem, quadratic assignment problems, graph coloring problems and many others.
- The history coefficient (α) controls the amount of contribution history plays in a components probability of selection and is commonly set to 1.0.
- The heuristic coefficient (β) controls the amount of contribution problem-specific heuristic information plays in a components probability of selection and is commonly between 2 and 5, such as 2.5.
- The decay factor (ρ) controls the rate at which historic information is lost and is commonly set to 0.5.
- The total number of ants (m) is commonly set to the number of components in the problem, such as the number of cities in the TSP.

9 Code Listing

Listing 1 provides an example of the Ant System algorithm implemented in the Ruby Programming Language. The algorithm is applied to the Berlin52 instance of the Traveling Salesman Problem (TSP), taken from the TSPLIB. The problem seeks a permutation of the order to visit cities (called a tour) that minimized the total distance traveled. The optimal tour distance for Berlin52 instance is 7542 units. Some extensions to the algorithm implementation for speed improvements may consider pre-calculating a distance matrix for all the cities in the problem, and pre-computing a probability matrix for choices during the probabilistic step-wise construction of tours.

```
def euc_2d(c1, c2)
  Math.sqrt((c1[0] - c2[0])**2.0 + (c1[1] - c2[1])**2.0).round
end

def cost(permutation, cities)
  distance =0
  permutation.each_with_index do |c1, i|
    c2 = (i==permutation.length-1) ? permutation[0] : permutation[i+1]
    distance += euc_2d(cities[c1], cities[c2])
  end
  return distance
end

def initialise_pheromone_matrix(num_cities, naive_score)
  v = num_cities.to_f / naive_score
  return Array.new(num_cities){|i| Array.new(num_cities, v)}
end

def nearest_neighbor_solution(cities)
  candidate = {}
  candidate[:vector] = [rand(cities.length)]
  all_cities = Array.new(cities.length) {|i| i}
  while candidate[:vector].length < cities.length
    next_city = {:city=>nil,:dist=>nil}
    candidates = all_cities - candidate[:vector]
    candidates.each do |city|
      dist = euc_2d(cities[candidate[:vector].last], city)
      if next_city[:city].nil? or next_city[:dist] < dist
        next_city[:city] = city
        next_city[:dist] = dist
      end
    end
    candidate[:vector] << next_city[:city]
  end
  candidate[:cost] = cost(candidate[:vector], cities)
  return candidate
end

def calculate_choices(cities, last_city, exclude, pheromone, c_heuristic, c_history)
  choices = []
  cities.each_with_index do |coord, i|
    next if exclude.include?(i)
    prob = {:city=>i}
    prob[:history] = pheromone[last_city][i] ** c_history
    prob[:distance] = euc_2d(cities[last_city], coord)
    prob[:heuristic] = (1.0/prob[:distance]) ** c_heuristic
    prob[:prob] = prob[:history] * prob[:heuristic]
    choices << prob
  end
  choices
end

def select_next_city(choices)
  sum = choices.inject(0.0){|sum,element| sum + element[:prob]}
  return choices[rand(choices.length)][:city] if sum == 0.0
  v, next_city = rand(), -1
  choices.each_with_index do |choice, i|
```

```ruby
    if i==choices.length-1
      next_city = choice[:city]
    else
      v -= (choice[:prob]/sum)
      if v <= 0.0
        next_city = choice[:city]
        break
      end
    end
  end
  return next_city
end

def stepwise_construction(cities, pheromone, c_heuristic, c_history)
  perm = []
  perm << rand(cities.length)
  begin
    choices = calculate_choices(cities, perm.last, perm, pheromone, c_heuristic, c_history)
    next_city = select_next_city(choices)
    perm << next_city
  end until perm.length == cities.length
  return perm
end

def decay_pheromone(pheromone, decay_factor)
  pheromone.each do |array|
    array.each_with_index do |p, i|
      array[i] = (1.0 - decay_factor) * p
    end
  end
end

def update_pheromone(pheromone, solutions)
  solutions.each do |candidate|
    update = 1.0 / candidate[:cost]
    candidate[:vector].each_with_index do |x, i|
      y = (i==candidate[:vector].length-1) ? candidate[:vector][0] : candidate[:vector][i+1]
      pheromone[x][y] += d
      pheromone[y][x] += d
    end
  end
end

def search(cities, max_iterations, num_ants, decay_factor, c_heuristic, c_history)
  best = nearest_neighbor_solution(cities)
  puts "Nearest Neighbor heuristic solution: cost=#{best[:cost]}"
  pheromone = initialise_pheromone_matrix(cities.length, best[:cost])
  max_iterations.times do |iter|
    solutions = []
    num_ants.times do
      candidate = {}
      candidate[:vector] = stepwise_construction(cities, pheromone, c_heuristic, c_history)
      candidate[:cost] = cost(candidate[:vector], cities)
      best = candidate if candidate[:cost] < best[:cost]
    end
    decay_pheromone(pheromone, decay_factor)
    update_pheromone(pheromone, solutions)
    puts " > iteration #{(iter+1)}, best=#{best[:cost]}"
  end
  return best
end

if __FILE__ == $0
```

```ruby
  berlin52 = [[565,575],[25,185],[345,750],[945,685],[845,655],[880,660],[25,230],
   [525,1000],[580,1175],[650,1130],[1605,620],[1220,580],[1465,200],[1530,5],
   [845,680],[725,370],[145,665],[415,635],[510,875],[560,365],[300,465],
   [520,585],[480,415],[835,625],[975,580],[1215,245],[1320,315],[1250,400],
   [660,180],[410,250],[420,555],[575,665],[1150,1160],[700,580],[685,595],
   [685,610],[770,610],[795,645],[720,635],[760,650],[475,960],[95,260],
   [875,920],[700,500],[555,815],[830,485],[1170,65],[830,610],[605,625],
   [595,360],[1340,725],[1740,245]]
  max_iterations = 50
  num_ants = berlin52.length
  decay_factor = 0.5
  c_heuristic = 2.5
  c_history = 1.0

  best = search(berlin52, max_iterations, num_ants, decay_factor, c_heuristic, c_history)
  puts "Done. Best Solution: c=#{best[:cost]}, v=#{best[:vector].inspect}"
end
```

Listing 1: Ant System algorithm in the Ruby Programming Language

10 References

10.1 Primary Sources

The Ant System was described by Dorigo, Maniezzo, and Colorni in an early technical report as a class of algorithms and was applied a number of standard combinatorial optimization algorithms [7]. A series of technical reports at this time investigated the class of algorithms called Ant System and the specific implementation called Ant Cycle. This effort contributed to Dorigo's PhD thesis published in Italian [5]. The seminal publication into the investigation of Ant System (with the implementation still referred to as Ant Cycle) was by Dorigo in 1996 [6].

10.2 Learn More

The seminal book on Ant Colony Optimization in general with a detailed treatment of Ant system is "Ant colony optimization" by Dorigo and Stützle [8]. An earlier book "Swarm intelligence: from natural to artificial systems" by Bonabeau, Dorigo, and Theraulaz also provides an introduction to Swarm Intelligence with a detailed treatment of Ant System [1].

11 Conclusions

This report described the Ant System algorithm using the standardized algorithm template. The algorithm implementation was based on a previous implementation by the author for the OAT project [2].

12 Contribute

Found a typo in the content or a bug in the source code? Are you an expert in this technique and know some facts that could improve the algorithm description for all? Do you want to get that warm feeling from contributing to an open source project? Do you want to see your name as an acknowledgment in print?

Two pillars of this effort are i) that the best domain experts are people outside of the project, and ii) that this work is subjected to continuous improvement. Please help to make this work less wrong by emailing the author 'Jason Brownlee' at jasonb@CleverAlgorithms.com or visit the project website at http://www.CleverAlgorithms.com.

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