Blocking: An R Package for Blocking of Records for Record Linkage and Deduplication

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Abstract An abstract of less than 250 words.

1 Introduction

Interactive data graphics provides plots that allow users to interact them. One of the most basic types of interaction is through tooltips, where users are provided additional information about elements in the plot by moving the cursor over the plot.

This paper will first review some R packages on interactive graphics and their tooltip implementations. A new package ToOoOlTiPs that provides customized tooltips for plot, is introduced. Some example plots will then be given to showcase how these tooltips help users to better read the graphics.

2 Background

Some packages on interactive graphics include **plotly** (Sievert, 2020) that interfaces with Javascript for web-based interactive graphics, **crosstalk** (Cheng and Sievert, 2021) that specializes cross-linking elements across individual graphics. The recent R Journal paper **tsibbletalk** (Wang and Cook, 2021) provides a good example of including interactive graphics into an article for the journal. It has both a set of linked plots, and also an animated gif example, illustrating linking between time series plots and feature summaries.

- 3 Blocking of records using blocking function
- 4 Integration with existing packages
- 5 Case study

5.1 Record linkage example

Let us first load the required packages.

library(blocking)
library(data.table)

We demonstrate the use of blocking function for record linkage on the foreigners dataset included in the package. This fictional representation of the foreign population in Poland was generated based on publicly available information, preserving the distributions from administrative registers. It contains 110,000 rows with 100,000 entities. Each row represents one record, with the following columns:

- fname first name,
- sname second name,
- surname surname.
- date date of birth,
- region region (county),

- country country,
- true_id person ID.

data(foreigners)
head(foreigners)

```
#>
       fname sname
                       surname
                                      date region country true_id
      <char> <char>
                        <char>
                                    <char> <char> <char>
                        imanov 1998/02/05
#> 1:
        emin
                                                      031
#> 2: nurlan
                    suleymanli 2000/08/01
                                                       031
                                                                 1
#> 3:
                    maharrsmov 1939/03/08
                                                      031
                                                                 2
        amio
#> 4:
        amik
                    maharramof 1939/03/08
                                                      031
                                                                 2
                    maharramov 1993/03/08
#> 5:
        amil
                                                      031
                                                                 2
#> 6: gadir
                    jahangirov 1991/08/29
                                                      031
                                                                 3
```

We split the dataset into two separate files: one containing the first appearance of each entity in the foreigners dataset, and the other containing its subsequent appearances.

```
foreigners_1 <- foreigners[!duplicated(foreigners$true_id), ]
foreigners_2 <- foreigners[duplicated(foreigners$true_id), ]</pre>
```

Now in both datasets we remove slashes from the date column and create a new string column that concatenates the information from all columns (excluding true_id) in each row.

```
foreigners_1[, date := gsub("/", "", date)]
foreigners_1[, txt := paste0(fname, sname, surname, date, region, country)]
foreigners_2[, date := gsub("/", "", date)]
foreigners_2[, txt := paste0(fname, sname, surname, date, region, country)]
head(foreigners_1)
#>
       fname sname
                       surname
                                   date region country true_id
#>
      <char> <char>
                        <char>
                                 <char> <char> <char>
                                                          <num>
#> 1:
        emin
                        imanov 19980205
                                                    031
#> 2: nurlan
                    suleymanli 20000801
                                                    031
                                                              1
                                                              2
#> 3: amio
                    maharrsmov 19390308
                                                    031
#> 4: gadir
                    jahangirov 19910829
                                                    031
                                                              3
                     bayramova 19961006 01261
                                                              4
#> 5:
       zaur
                                                    031
#> 6:
        asif
                      mammadov 19970726
                                                    031
                                                              5
#>
                                 txt
#>
#> 1:
              eminimanov19980205031
       nurlansuleymanli20000801031
#> 2:
#> 3:
         amiomaharrsmov19390308031
         gadirjahangirov19910829031
#> 5: zaurbayramova1996100601261031
#> 6:
            asifmammadov19970726031
```

General use

We use the newly created columns in the blocking function, which relies on the default **rnndescent** (Nearest Neighbor Descent) algorithm based on cosine distance. Additionally, we set verbose = 1 to monitor progress. Note that a default parameter of the blocking function is seed = 2023, which sets the random seed.

```
\#> ===== creating tokens ===== 
\#> ===== starting search (nnd, x, y: 100000, 10000, t: 1232) ===== 
\#> ===== creating graph =====
```

Now we examine the results of record linkage.

- We have created 6,469 blocks.
- The blocking process utilized 1,232 columns (2 character shingles).
- We have 3,916 blocks of 2 elements, 1,604 blocks of 3 elements,..., 2 blocks of 7 elements.

result_reclin

Structure of the object is as follows:

- result a data. table with identifiers and block IDs,
- method name of the ANN algorithm used,
- deduplication whether deduplication was applied,
- representation whether shingles or vectors were used,
- metrics metrics for quality assessment (here NULL),
- confusion confusion matrix (here NULL),
- colnames column names used for the comparison,
- graph an igraph object, mainly for visualization (here NULL).

```
str(result_reclin, 1)
```

```
#> List of 8
#> $ result
              :Classes 'data.table' and 'data.frame': 10000 obs. of 4 variables:
  ..- attr(*, ".internal.selfref")=<externalptr>
#> $ method
                 : chr "nnd"
#> $ deduplication : logi FALSE
#> $ representation: chr "shingles"
#> $ metrics
                 : NULL
#> $ confusion
                  : NULL
                  : chr [1:1232] "0a" "0b" "0c" "0m" ...
#> $ colnames
#> $ graph
                   : NULL
#> - attr(*, "class")= chr "blocking"
```

The resulting data. table has four columns:

- x reference dataset (i.e. foreigners_1) this may not contain all units of foreigners_1,
- y query (each row of foreigners_2) this may not contain all units of foreigners_2,
- block block ID,
- dist distance between objects.

head(result_reclin\$result)

```
#>
            y block
                      dist
       Χ
    <int> <int> <num>
#>
                      <num>
      3 1 1 0.2216882
#> 1:
      3
#> 2:
           2
                1 0.2122737
#> 3:
      21
           3
                2 0.1172652
          4
               3 0.1863238
      57
#> 4:
      57 5 3 0.1379310
#> 5:
#> 6:
       61 6
                 4 0.2307692
```

Let's examine the first pair. Obviously, there are typos in the fname and surname. Nevertheless, the pair is a match.

```
cbind(t(foreigners_1[3, 1:6]), t(foreigners_2[1, 1:6]))
```

```
#> [,1] [,2]
#> fname "amio" "amik"
#> sname "" ""
#> surname "maharrsmov" "maharramof"
#> date "19390308" "19390308"
#> region "" ""
#> country "031" "031"
```

Now we use the true_id values to evaluate our approach.

```
matches <- merge(x = foreigners_1[, .(x = 1:.N, true_id)],
               y = foreigners_2[, .(y = 1:.N, true_id)],
               by = "true_id")
matches[, block := rleid(x)]
head(matches)
#> Key: <true_id>
#>
    true_id x y block
       <num> <int> <int> <int>
#>
#> 1:
         2 3
                   1
#> 2:
         2
               3
#> 3:
        20
               21
         56
               57
                     4
                           3
#> 4:
#> 5:
          56
               57
                      5
                           3
#> 6:
         60
                      6
                           4
               61
```

We have 10,000 matched pairs. We use the true_blocks parameter in the blocking function to specify the true block assignments. We obtain the quality metrics for the assessment of record linkage.

```
#> Blocking based on the nnd method.
#> Number of blocks: 6469.
#> Number of columns used for blocking: 1232.
#> Reduction ratio: 0.9999.
#> Distribution of the size of the blocks:
    2 3 4 5
                   6
#> 3916 1604 926
               19
#> Evaluation metrics (standard):
      recall precision fpr fnr
96.7782 78.7000 0.0038 3.2218
                                    fnr accuracy specificity
#>
#>
     96.7782
                                            99.9957
                                                        99.9962
#>
    f1_score
#>
     86.8079
```

For example, our approach results in a 3.22% false negative rate (FNR). To improve this, we can increase the epsilon parameter of the NND method from 0.1 to 0.5. To do so, we configure the control_ann parameter in the blocking function using the controls_ann and control_nnd functions.

```
result_3_reclin <- blocking(x = foreigners_1$txt,</pre>
                        y = foreigners_2$txt,
                        verbose = 1,
                        true_blocks = matches[, .(x, y, block)],
                        control_ann = controls_ann(
                          nnd = control_nnd(epsilon = 0.5)))
#> ===== creating tokens =====
#> ===== starting search (nnd, x, y: 100000, 10000, t: 1232) =====
#> ===== creating graph =====
result_3_reclin
#> Blocking based on the nnd method.
#> Number of blocks: 6392.
#> Number of columns used for blocking: 1232.
#> Reduction ratio: 0.9999.
#> Distribution of the size of the blocks:
       3 4
                5
                      7
#>
     2
#> 3798 1613 956
                 21
                       4
#> Evaluation metrics (standard):
                                    fnr accuracy specificity
      recall precision fpr
#>
                          0.0036 3.1318
                                               99.9960 99.9964
#>
      96.8682
               80.1100
#>
     f1_score
#>
      87.6957
```

That decreases the FNR to 3.13%.

Integration with the reclin2 package

Let us load the reclin2 package.

library(reclin2)

Now we present record linkage using the pair_ann function. It is based on the pair_minism function and reuses some of its source code. The on parameter specifies the column names for the approximate nearest neighbours (ANN) search. Setting deduplication = FALSE enables record linkage. The function works as follows.

```
result_pair_ann <- pair_ann(x = foreigners_1,</pre>
                            y = foreigners_2,
                             on = c("fname", "sname", "surname",
                                    "date", "region", "country"),
                             deduplication = FALSE)
head(result_pair_ann)
#>
     First data set: 100 000 records
#>
     Second data set: 10 000 records
    Total number of pairs: 6 pairs
#>
     Blocking on: 'fname', 'sname', 'surname', 'date', 'region', 'country'
#>
#>
#>
               .y block
         . X
     <int> <int> <num>
#>
        3
#> 1:
              1
         3
#> 2:
                2
                      1
#> 3:
        21
                3
                      2
#> 4:
               4
         57
                      3
#> 5:
         57
                5
                      3
#> 6:
         61
```

The pair_ann function returns the total number of pairs. This output can be integrated into the pipeline of the reclin2 package. We compare pairs across all selected variables using the Jaro-Winkler distance. The similarity scores are summed across the variables and we set threshold = 4.5 to accept a pair.

```
selected_pair_ann <- result_pair_ann |>
 compare_pairs(on = c("fname", "sname", "surname",
                     "date", "region", "country"),
               comparators = list(cmp_jarowinkler())) |>
 score_simple("score",
             on = c("fname", "sname", "surname",
                     "date", "region", "country")) |>
 select_threshold("threshold", score = "score", threshold = 4.5) |>
 link(selection = "threshold")
head(selected_pair_ann)
#>
    Total number of pairs: 6 pairs
#>
#> Key: <.y>
#>
           . X
                 fname.x sname.x surname.x
                                              date.x region.x country.x
        . у
                                              <char> <char>
     <int> <int>
                   <char> <char> <char>
                                                                <char>
#>
                    amio maharrsmov 19390308
       1 3
#> 1:
                                                                   031
              3
#> 2:
         2
                                maharrsmov 19390308
                     amio
                                                                   031
                  amil
         3
              21
                                  khalilov 19990901
                                                        01465
#> 3:
                                                                   031
#> 4:
              57 javansjir
                                 m kayilov 19691011
                                                                   031
         4
#> 5:
         5
              57 javansjir
                                 m kayilov 19691011
                                                                   031
         6
#> 6:
             61 rashad
                                   mehtiyev 19980320
                                                                   031
     true_id.x
                                     txt.x fname.y sname.y surname.y
#>
#>
                                    <char> <char> <char>
                                                                <char>
         <num>
```

#>	1:	2	amioma	harrsmov	1939030803	31 amik	maharramof
#>	2:	2	amioma	harrsmov	1939030803	31 amil	maharramov
#>	3:	20	amilkhali	lov19990	99010146503	31 amul	khalilpv
#>	4:	56	javansjirm	kayilov	/1969101103	31 javanshir	mikayilov
#>	5:	56	javansjirm	kayilov	/1969101103	31 javsnshir	m kayilov
#>	6:	60	rashad	mehtiyev	1998032003	31 rasgad	meht9yev
#>		date.y	region.y co	untry.y	<pre>true_id.y</pre>		txt.y
#>		<char></char>	<char></char>	<char></char>	<num></num>		<char></char>
#>	1:	19390308		031	2	amikmaha	rramof19390308031
#>	2:	19930308		031	2	amilmaha	rramov19930308031
#>	3:	19990901	01465	031	20	amulkhalilp	v1999090101465031
#>	4:	19961011		031	56	javanshirmik	ayilov19961011031
#>	5:	19691011		031	56	javsnshirm k	ayilov19691011031
#>	6:	19890320		031	60	rasgadme	ht9yev19890320031

We observe that the example pairs are matches.

5.2 Deduplication example

We demonstrate deduplication using the blocking function on the RLdata500 dataset from the RecordLinkage package. Note that the dataset is included in the blocking package. It contains artificial personal data. Fifty records have been duplicated with randomly generated errors. Each row represents one record, with the following columns:

- fname_c1 first name, first component,
- fname_c2 first name, second component,
- lname_c1 last name, first component,
- lname_c2 last name, second component,
- by year of birth,
- bm month of birth,
- bd day of birth,
- rec_id record id,
- ent_id entity id.

data(RLdata500)
head(RLdata500)

#>		fname_c1	fname_c2	lname_c1	lname_c2	by	bm	bd	rec_id	${\tt ent_id}$
#>		<char></char>	<char></char>	<char></char>	<char></char>	<int></int>	<int></int>	<int></int>	<int></int>	<int></int>
#>	1:	CARSTEN		MEIER		1949	7	22	1	34
#>	2:	GERD		BAUER		1968	7	27	2	51
#>	3:	ROBERT		HARTMANN		1930	4	30	3	115
#>	4:	STEFAN		WOLFF		1957	9	2	4	189
#>	5:	RALF		KRUEGER		1966	1	13	5	72
#>	6:	JUERGEN		FRANKE		1929	7	4	6	142

We create a new column (id_count) that indicates how many times a given unit occurs and then add leading zeros to the bm and bd columns. Finally, we create a new string column that concatenates the information from all columns (excluding rec_id, ent_id and id_count) in each row.

```
RLdata500[, id_count :=.N, ent_id]
RLdata500[, bm:=sprintf("%02d", bm)]
RLdata500[, bd:=sprintf("%02d", bd)]
RLdata500[, txt:=tolower(
   paste0(fname_c1,fname_c2,lname_c1,lname_c2,by,bm,bd))]
head(RLdata500)
```

```
#>
      fname_c1 fname_c2 lname_c1 lname_c2
                                                by
                                                        bm
                                                                bd rec_id ent_id
                  <char>
                                                                    <int>
#>
        <char>
                            <char>
                                      <char> <int> <char> <char>
                                                                            <int>
       CARSTEN
                                                        07
                                                                               34
#> 1:
                             MFTFR
                                              1949
                                                                22
                                                                        1
                                                                               51
#> 2:
          GERD
                             BAUER
                                              1968
                                                        97
                                                                27
                                                                        2
                         HARTMANN
                                                                30
                                                                        3
#> 3:
        ROBERT
                                              1930
                                                        04
                                                                              115
                                              1957
                                                        09
                                                                02
                                                                        4
                                                                              189
#> 4:
        STEFAN
                             WOLFF
                                                                        5
#> 5:
                                              1966
                                                        01
                                                                13
          RALF
                           KRUEGER
                                                                               72
      JUERGEN
                            FRANKE
                                              1929
                                                        07
                                                                04
                                                                        6
                                                                              142
#> 6:
#>
      id count
                                     txt
#>
         <int>
                                 <char>
#> 1:
              1
                  carstenmeier19490722
#> 2:
              2
                     gerdbauer19680727
#> 3:
             1 roberthartmann19300430
#> 4:
              1
                   stefanwolff19570902
#> 5:
                   ralfkrueger19660113
              1
#> 6:
                 juergenfranke19290704
```

As in the previous example, we use the txt column in the blocking function. This time, we set ann = hnsw to use the Hierarchical Navigable Small World (HNSW) algorithm from the RcppHNSW package and graph = TRUE to obtain an igraph object for visualization.

```
result_dedup_hnsw <- blocking(x = RLdata500$txt,
                         ann = "hnsw",
                         graph = TRUE,
                         verbose = 1)
#> ===== creating tokens =====
\# ===== starting search (hnsw, x, y: 500, 500, t: 429) =====
#> ===== creating graph =====
  The results are as follows.
result_dedup_hnsw
#> Blocking based on the hnsw method.
#> Number of blocks: 133.
#> Number of columns used for blocking: 429.
#> Reduction ratio: 0.9916.
#> Distribution of the size of the blocks:
  2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 17
#> 46 35 23 8 6 6 2 3 1 1 1 1
head(result_dedup_hnsw$result)
#>
        Х
             y block
                         dist
#>
     <int> <int> <num>
                        <num>
#> 1:
```

Now we visualize connections using the obtained graph.

35 0.47379863

1 0.08074522

1 0.41023219

88 0.43263358

13 0.52565831

2 0.51333570

1

2

2

3

4

5

#> 2:

#> 3:

#> 4:

#> 5:

#> 6:

64

43

486

450

50

128

plot(result_dedup_hnsw\$graph, vertex.size = 1, vertex.label = NA)

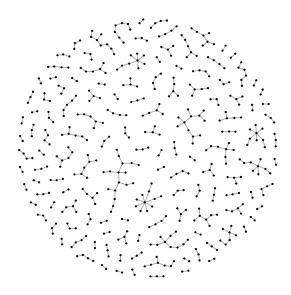


Figure 1: Connection graph

We create a long data. table with information on blocks and units from the original dataset.

df_block_melted <- melt(result_dedup_hnsw\$result, id.vars = c("block", "dist"))
df_block_melted_rec_block <- unique(df_block_melted[, .(rec_id=value, block)])
head(df_block_melted_rec_block)</pre>

```
#>
      rec_id block
#>
       <int> <num>
           1
#> 1:
#> 2:
            2
                 1
#> 3:
#> 4:
                 13
#> 5:
            5
                  2
#> 6:
            6
                 35
```

We add the block information to the final dataset.

RLdata500[df_block_melted_rec_block, on = "rec_id", block_id := i.block]
head(RLdata500)

#> 2:	GERD	BAUER	1968	07	27	2	51
#> 3:	ROBERT	HARTMANN	1930	04	30	3	115
#> 4:	STEFAN	WOLFF	1957	09	02	4	189
#> 5:	RALF	KRUEGER	1966	01	13	5	72
#> 6:	JUERGEN	FRANKE	1929	07	04	6	142
#>	id_count	txt	block_id				
#>	<int></int>	<char></char>	<num></num>				
#> 1:	1	carstenmeier19490722	35				
#> 2:	2	gerdbauer19680727	1				
#> 3:	1	roberthartmann19300430	88				
#> 4:	1	stefanwolff19570902	13				
#> 5:	1	ralfkrueger19660113	2				
#> 6:	1	juergenfranke19290704	35				

We can check in how many blocks the same entities (ent_id) are observed. In our example, all the same entities are in the same blocks.

```
RLdata500[, .(uniq_blocks = uniqueN(block_id)), .(ent_id)][, .N, uniq_blocks]
```

```
#> uniq_blocks N
#> <int> <int>
#> 1: 1 450
```

Now we can visualize the distances between the units stored in the result_dedup_hnsw\$result dataset. Clearly we have a mixture of two groups: matches (close to 0) and non-matches (close to 1).

```
hist(result_dedup_hnsw$result$dist, xlab = "Distances",
    ylab = "Frequency", breaks = "fd",
    main = "Distances calculated between units")
```

Distances calculated between units

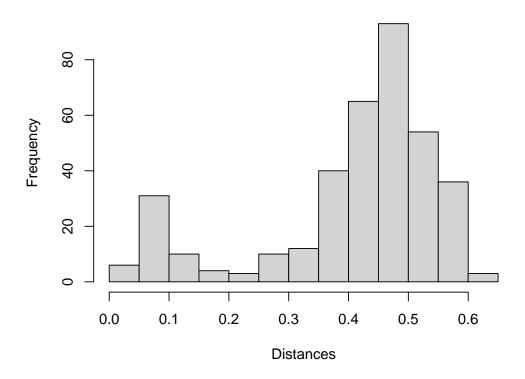


Figure 2: Distances calculated between units

Finally, we visualize the result based on the information whether a block contains matches or not.

```
df_for_density <- copy(df_block_melted[block %in% RLdata500$block_id])
df_for_density[, match:= block %in% RLdata500[id_count == 2]$block_id]

plot(density(df_for_density[match==FALSE]$dist),
        col = "blue", xlim = c(0, 0.8),
        main = "Distribution of distances between\n
        clusters type (match=red, non-match=blue)")
lines(density(df_for_density[match==TRUE]$dist),
        col = "red", xlim = c(0, 0.8))</pre>
```

Distribution of distances between

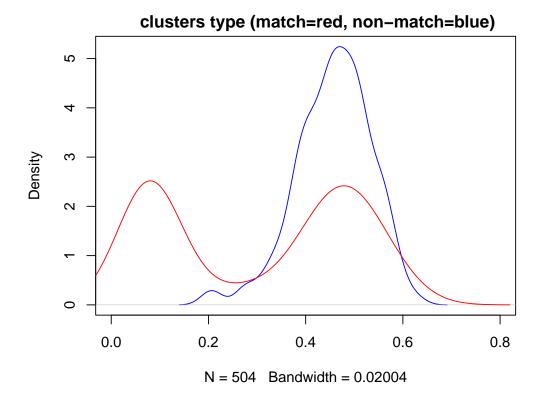


Figure 3: Distribution of distances between clusters type

Now we compare the evaluation metrics across all ANN algorithms supported by the blocking function, i.e. NND, HNSW, Approximate Nearest Neighbors Oh Yeah (Annoy, from the RcppAnnoy package), Locality-sensitive hashing (LSH, from the mlpack package), and k-Nearest Neighbors (kNN – denoted as "kd", from the mlpack package). We use the rec_id and ent_id columns from the RLdata500 dataset to specify the true blocks and then calculate evaluation metrics for all algorithms. Additionally, we assess blocking using the klsh function from the klsh package, configured to create 10 blocks and 100 blocks, respectively. In both settings, we use 20 random projections and 2-character shingles. The results are as follows (klsh_10 and klsh_100 refer to the klsh algorithm with 10 blocks and 100 blocks, respectively).

Tabl	le	1:	Α	basic	table
Iavi	LC	1.	Δ	Dasic	table

species	island	bill_length_mm	bill_depth_mm	flipper_length_mm	body_mass_g	sex	year
Adelie	Torgersen	39.1	18.7	181	3750	male	2007
Adelie	Torgersen	39.5	17.4	186	3800	female	2007
Adelie	Torgersen	40.3	18.0	195	3250	female	2007
Adelie	Torgersen	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	2007
Adelie	Torgersen	36.7	19.3	193	3450	female	2007
Adelie	Torgersen	39.3	20.6	190	3650	male	2007

```
k = 2
klsh_10_metrics <- klsh::confusion.from.blocking(</pre>
  blocking = blocks_klsh_10,
  true_ids = RLdata500$ent_id)[-1]
klsh_10_metrics$f1_score <- 2 * klsh_10_metrics$precision *
  klsh_10_metrics$recall /
  (klsh_10_metrics$precision + klsh_10_metrics$recall)
eval_metrics$klsh_10 <- unlist(klsh_10_metrics)</pre>
blocks_klsh_100 <- klsh::klsh(
  r.set = RLdata500[, c("fname_c1", "fname_c2", "lname_c1",
                      "lname_c2", "by", "bm", "bd")],
  p = 20,
  num.blocks = 100,
  k = 2
klsh_100_metrics <- klsh::confusion.from.blocking(</pre>
  blocking = blocks_klsh_100,
  true_ids = RLdata500$ent_id)[-1]
klsh_100_metrics$f1_score <- 2 * klsh_100_metrics$precision *
  klsh_100_metrics$recall /
  (klsh_100_metrics$precision + klsh_100_metrics$recall)
eval_metrics$klsh_100 <- unlist(klsh_100_metrics)</pre>
do.call(rbind, eval_metrics) * 100
         recall precision
#>
                                fpr fnr accuracy specificity f1_score
#> nnd
            100 5.0607287 0.7522053 0 99.24810 99.24779 9.633911
            100 4.7573739 0.8027265 0 99.19760 99.19727 9.082652
#> hnsw
           100 4.8030740 0.7947073 0 99.20561 99.20529 9.165903
#> annoy
#> 1sh
             98 1.1207685 3.4667201 2 96.53387 96.53328 2.216192
            100 4.3066322 0.8909383 0 99.10942 99.10906 8.257638
#> kd
```

6 Customizing tooltip design with ToOoOlTiPs

ToOoOlTiPs is a packages for customizing tooltips in interactive graphics, it features these possibilities.

7 A gallery of tooltips examples

The palmerpenguins data (Horst et al., 2020) features three penguin species which has a lovely illustration by Alison Horst in Figure 4.

Table 1 prints at the first few rows of the penguins data:

Figure 5 shows an plot of the penguins data, made using the ggplot2 package.

penguins %>%

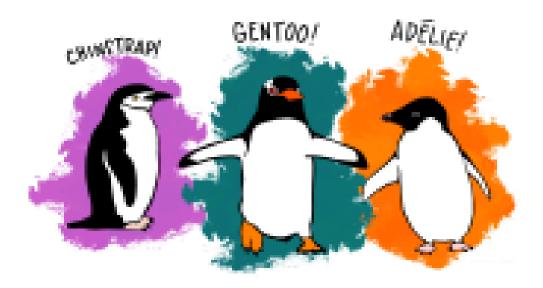


Figure 4: Artwork by allison_horst

8 Summary

We have displayed various tooltips that are available in the package **ToOoOlTiPs**.

9 Acknowledgements

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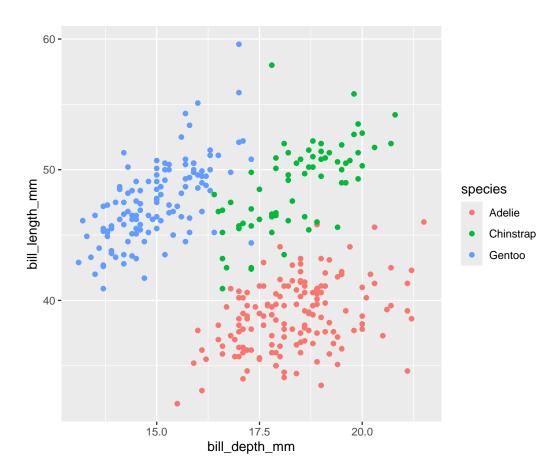


Figure 5: A basic non-interactive plot made with the ggplot2 package on palmer penguin data. Three species of penguins are plotted with bill depth on the x-axis and bill length on the y-axis. Visit the online article to access the interactive version made with the plotly package.

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