

ON SIERPINSKI SETS

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ABSTRACT. We prove that it is consistent with ZFC that every Sierpinski set is strongly meager. It is also proved that under CH every Sierpinski set is a union of two strongly meager sets.

0. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to prove two theorems concerning the relationship between Sierpinski sets and strongly meager sets.

Definition. A set $S \subseteq \mathbf{R}$ is called a Sierpinski set if S is uncountable and $S \cap H$ is countable for every measure zero set $H \subseteq \mathbf{R}$.

A set $X \subseteq \mathbf{R}$ is called strongly meager if for every null set $H \subseteq \mathbf{R}$ there exists $x \in \mathbf{R}$ such that $(X + x) \cap H = \emptyset$.

The main problem of this paper was asked by F. Galvin:

Is every Sierpinski set strongly meager?

It should be noted that the “dual” question obtained from the above by replacing the word “meager” by “null” and vice versa has a positive answer. In other words every Luzin set has strong measure zero (see [M] for this and many related results).

We will show that the answer to Galvin’s question is consistently positive—there exists a model of ZFC where every Sierpinski set is strongly meager.

Another very important question about these sets is the following:

Do strongly meager sets form an ideal (σ -ideal)?

We will show that these two questions are closely related by showing that:

Theorem. *Assume CH. Then every Sierpinski set is a union of two strongly meager sets.*

Finally we show that the assumption of CH is not very restrictive—a positive answer to both questions under CH yields a positive answer in ZFC.

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1. Let us start with the following simple observation: If both questions can be settled under CH then they can be settled in ZFC alone. In other words we have the following:

Theorem 1. (a) *Suppose that $ZFC + CH \vdash$ every Sierpinski set is strongly meager. Then every Sierpinski set is strongly meager.*

(b) *Suppose that $ZFC + CH \vdash$ strongly meager sets form an ideal. Then strongly meager sets form an ideal.*

Proof. We prove only part (a)—the proof of (b) is exactly the same.

Suppose that (a) is not true. Let M be a model of ZFC such that $M \models$ there exists a Sierpinski set which is not strongly meager. Let \mathbb{P} be the σ -closed notion of forcing which collapses 2^ω onto ω_1 . Let $G \subseteq \mathbb{P}$ be an M -generic filter. Then since \mathbb{P} does not add new reals $M[G] \models ZFC + CH +$ there exists a Sierpinski set which is not strongly meager. Contradiction. \square

Now let us show that there exists a model where all Sierpinski sets are strongly meager. Of course one can take a model where there are no Sierpinski sets but this is not exactly what we want.

Theorem 2. *It is consistent with ZFC that there are Sierpinski sets and all of them are strongly meager.*

Proof. Let M be any model of ZFC in which $2^\omega > \omega_1$ and Lebesgue measure is 2^ω -additive. For example M can be a model for $MA + \neg CH$. Let B_{ω_1} be the algebra adding simultaneously ω_1 random reals. For $\alpha < \omega_1$ let B_α be the subalgebra of B_{ω_1} which adds α many random reals. Also denote by B the standard measure algebra. Let $G \subseteq B_{\omega_1}$ be a generic filter over M . We will show that the model $N = M[G]$ has the required properties.

The following facts are well known (see [J]):

Lemma 1. (a) *For every $\alpha < \omega_1$, $B_\alpha \simeq B$.*

(b) *For every $\alpha < \omega_1$, $M[G \cap B_\alpha] \models M \cap \mathbf{R}$ does not have measure zero.* \square

Lemma 2. *$N \models$ there are no Sierpinski sets of size $> \omega_1$.*

Proof. Suppose not and let S be a Sierpinski set of size $> \omega_1$ in N . Since every element of S has a B_{ω_1} -name which depends on countable many “coordinates” there is an uncountable set $S' \subseteq S$ and $\alpha < \omega_1$ such that $S' \in M[G \cap B_\alpha]$. Clearly S' is a Sierpinski set in $M[G \cap B_\alpha]$.

To get a contradiction it is enough to see that:

Lemma 3. *For every $\alpha < \omega_1$*

$N_\alpha = M[G \cap B_\alpha] \models$ *Lebesgue measure is 2^ω -additive.*

Proof. Fix $\alpha < \omega_1$. By Lemma 1 $N_\alpha = M[G \cap B_\alpha] = M[r]$ where r is a random real over M . Suppose that $\{H^\beta : \beta < \lambda < 2^\omega\}$ is a family of Borel, null subsets of 2^ω in N_α . It is well known that for every Borel, null set H in $M[r]$ there exists a Borel, null set $\hat{H} \subseteq 2^\omega \times 2^\omega$ such that

$$H = (\hat{H})_r = \text{vertical section of } \hat{H} \text{ on } r.$$

Therefore we have a family of Borel, null subsets of $2^\omega \times 2^\omega \{ \hat{H}^\beta : \beta < \lambda \} \subseteq M$. By the assumption that the Lebesgue measure is 2^ω -additive in M there exists a Borel, null set $A \subseteq 2^\omega \times 2^\omega$ such that $\bigcup_{\beta < \lambda} \hat{H}^\beta \subseteq A$. In particular the section $(A)_r$ is a Borel, null set in $M[r]$ which covers $\bigcup_{\beta < \lambda} (\hat{H}^\beta)_r = \bigcup_{\beta < \lambda} H^\beta$.

Since the choice of a family of null sets was arbitrary it finishes the proof. \square

Lemma 3 clearly implies that there are no Sierpinski sets in N_α , which finishes the proof of Lemma 2. \square

It should be noted here that there are Sierpinski sets in N . In particular the set of ω_1 random reals added by the filter G is the simplest example.

Now we can finish the proof of the theorem.

Lemma 4. $N \models$ every Sierpinski set is strongly meager.

Proof. Let $S \in N$ be a Sierpinski set and let H be a Borel, null set. Since H is coded by a real number we can find $\alpha < \omega_1$ such that $H \in N_\alpha$.

Let $S' = \{x \in S : x \text{ is not random over } N_\alpha\}$. Using Lemma 3 we easily see that S' is a countable set. \square

Lemma 5. *There exists $z \in M \cap \mathbf{R}$ such that $(z + S') \cap H = \emptyset$.*

Proof. By Lemma 1 (b) we know that $M \cap \mathbf{R}$ is not of measure zero in N_α (and in N). On the other hand the set $S' + H$ is of measure zero. Therefore there exists $z \in M \cap \mathbf{R}$ such that $z \notin S' + H$. It is clear that this is an element we are looking for. \square

This finishes the proof of the theorem: let z be the element from Lemma 5. For $x \in S'$, $z + x \notin H$ by Lemma 5. On the other hand if $x \in S - S'$, x is a random real over N_α . Since $z \in M \subseteq N_\alpha$, $z + x$ is random over N_α as well. Therefore $z + x \notin H$ for every $x \in S$. \square

Now we prove:

Theorem 2. *Assume CH. Then every Sierpinski set is a union of at most two strongly meager sets.*

Proof. Let $S \subseteq \mathbf{R}$ be a Sierpinski set. We want to find two strongly meager sets S^0 and S^1 such that $S = S^0 \cup S^1$. Let $\{H_\alpha : \alpha < \omega_1\}$ be an enumeration of Borel, null sets such that $H_\alpha \subseteq H_\beta$ for $\alpha \leq \beta < \omega_1$, and for every null set $H \subseteq \mathbf{R}$ there is $\alpha < \omega_1$ such that $H \subseteq H_\alpha$.

We build a sequence $\{S_\alpha^1, S_\alpha^2 : \alpha < \omega_1\}$ of countable subsets of S having the following two properties:

$$(*) \quad S = \bigcup_{\alpha < \omega_1} S_\alpha^1 \cup S_\alpha^2$$

and

$$(**) \quad \text{for every } \alpha < \omega_1 \text{ there are } z_\alpha^1, z_\alpha^2 \in \mathbf{R} \text{ such that } S_\beta^1 \cap (H_\alpha + z_\alpha^1) = \emptyset \text{ and } S_\beta^2 \cap (H_\alpha + z_\alpha^2) = \emptyset \text{ for all } \beta < \omega_1.$$

This would clearly finish the proof: let $S^1 = \bigcup_{\alpha < \omega_1} S_\alpha^1$ and $S^2 = \bigcup_{\alpha < \omega_1} S_\alpha^2$. By (*) $S = S^1 \cup S^2$. Let $H \subseteq \mathbf{R}$ be a null set. Find $\alpha < \omega_1$ such that $H \subseteq H_\alpha$. By (**), $S^1 \cap (H_\alpha + z_\alpha^1) = \emptyset$, hence $S_1 \cap (H + z_\alpha^1) = \emptyset$. The same holds for the set S^2 .

Therefore the problem is to define the sequence $\{S_\alpha^1, S_\alpha^2: \alpha < \omega_1\}$ having the properties above. The idea of the construction is the following:

Condition (*) will be taken care of using some kind of back and forth argument. For condition (**) we will use the following trick: to make sure that $S_\beta^1 \cap (H_\alpha + z_\alpha^1) = \emptyset$ for $\beta \leq \alpha$ we will use the fact that $\bigcup_{\beta \leq \alpha} S_\beta^1$ is a countable set and we pick suitable real z_α^1 . In order to ensure that $S_\beta^1 \cap (H_\alpha + z_\alpha^1) = \emptyset$ for $\beta > \alpha$ we will construct those sets in such a way that all elements of S_β^1 for $\beta > \alpha$ are random over some model containing H_α and z_α^1 .

The details of the construction are the following: We construct a sequence $\{S_\alpha^1, S_\alpha^2: \alpha < \omega_1\}$ together with an increasing sequence of countable, elementary substructures $\{M_\alpha, N_\alpha: \alpha < \omega_1\}$ of a suitably big part of the universe, say $H(\kappa, \epsilon)$ for $\kappa > (2^\omega)^+$. From now on by model we will mean a structure as above.

For a structure M containing S let $S(M) = \{x \in S: x \text{ is not random over } M\}$. It is clear that the set $S(M)$ is countable if M is countable. This is because in that case the set of reals which are not random over M is null and S is a Sierpinski set.

Before the general definition we will describe a few steps of the construction. Let M_0 be a countable model containing H_0 and S . Define

$$S_0^1 = S(M_0) \cap H_0 \quad \text{and} \quad S_0^2 = S(M_0) - S_0^1.$$

We have to find reals $z_\alpha^1, z_\alpha^2 \in \mathbf{R}$ satisfying condition (**). Notice that $S_0^1 = S \cap H_0$ is a countable set in M_0 and therefore we can pick z_0^1 to be any element of M_0 which does not belong to $S_0^1 + H_0$. In order to find z_0^2 we have to work outside M_0 . Let N_0 be a countable model containing M_0 such that $N_0 \models "S(M_0) \text{ is a countable set in } N_0"$. Again we easily find a real z_0^2 in N_0 satisfying (**). Notice that at that point we partitioned the set $S(M_0)$ into two pieces. Every other element of S is random over M_0 so (**) is satisfied for the set H_0 and set S_α^1 no matter how they are defined. This is due to the fact that if x is a random real over a model M and $z \in M$ is a real then $x + z$ is a random real over M , so in particular is not in H_0 . Now in N_0 there are probably some new elements of S . To take care of them, let M_1 be a countable model containing N_0 and H_1 such that $M_1 \models "S(N_0) \text{ is a countable set in } M_1"$.

Let $S_1^1 = (S(M_1) \cap H_1) \cup (S(N_0) - S(M_0))$ and $S_1^2 = (S(M_1) - S_1^1) - S(M_0)$. By the same argument as above (applied to $S_0^1 \cup S_1^1$) we get a real $z_1^1 \in M_1$

satisfying (**). To get z_α^1 we construct a model N_α containing M_α such that $N_\alpha \models "S(M_\alpha) \text{ is a countable set in } N_\alpha"$, and so on.

In general suppose that the sets S_β^1, S_β^2 , reals z_β^1, z_β^2 and models M_β, N_β have already been constructed for $\beta < \alpha < \omega_1$. In addition assume that $\bigcup_{\xi < \gamma} S_\xi^1 \cup S_\xi^2 = S(M_\gamma)$ for $\gamma < \beta < \alpha$. We have to find $S_\alpha^1, S_\alpha^2, z_\alpha^1, z_\alpha^2$ and M_α, N_α . Let M_α be a countable model such that

1. $M_\beta, N_\beta \subseteq M_\alpha$ for $\beta < \alpha$,
2. $M_\alpha \models " \bigcup_{\beta < \alpha} S(N_\beta) \text{ is a countable set in } M_\alpha "$,
3. $H_\alpha \in M_\alpha$.

Consider the set $T = S(M_\alpha) - \bigcup_{\beta < \alpha} S(M_\beta)$. Sets S_α^1 and S_α^2 will be obtained by partitioning T into two pieces. We have two cases:

Case 1. α is a limit ordinal. In this case let $S_\alpha^1 = T \cap H_\alpha$ and $S_\alpha^2 = T - S_\alpha^1$. We easily see that $M_\alpha \models "S_\alpha^1 \text{ is countable}"$ and therefore we can find $z_\alpha^1 \in M_\alpha \cap \mathbf{R}$ such that

$$\bigcup_{\beta < \alpha} S_\beta^1 \cap (H_\alpha + z_\alpha^1) = \emptyset.$$

Let N_α be a model containing M_α such that $N_\alpha \models "T \text{ is a countable set in } N_\alpha"$. The same argument as above gives us $z_\alpha^2 \in N_\alpha \cap \mathbf{R}$ with the property that

$$\bigcup_{\beta < \alpha} S_\beta^2 \cap (H_\alpha + z_\alpha^2) = \emptyset.$$

Case 2. α is a successor ordinal, say $\alpha = \beta + 1$. Notice that in this case T is equal to $S(M_\alpha) - S(M_\beta) = (S(M_\alpha) - S(N_\beta)) \cup (S(N_\beta) - S(M_\beta))$. Define

$$S_\alpha^1 = (T \cap H_\alpha) \cup (S(N_\beta) - S(M_\beta)) \quad \text{and} \quad S_\alpha^2 = T - S_\alpha^1.$$

In exactly the same way as above we find z_α^1, N_α and then z_α^2 .

We have to check that conditions (*) and (**) are satisfied. Notice that $\bigcup_{\xi < \gamma} S_\xi^1 \cup S_\xi^2 = S(M_\gamma)$ for $\gamma < \omega_1$. Therefore

$$\bigcup_{\alpha < \omega_1} S_\alpha^1 \cup S_\alpha^2 = S \quad \text{since} \quad \bigcup_{\alpha < \omega_1} S(M_\alpha) = S.$$

For (**) observe that for $\beta \leq \alpha < \omega_1$, $S_\beta^1 \cap (H_\alpha + z_\alpha^1) = \emptyset$ by the choice of z_α^1 . On the other hand if $\beta > \alpha$ then $S_\beta^1 \cap S(M_\alpha) = \emptyset$, which means that elements of S_β^1 are random reals over M_α . Hence $S_\beta^1 \cap (H_\alpha + z_\alpha^1) = \emptyset$ because $z_\alpha^1 \in M_\alpha \cap \mathbf{R}$. The case of the other sequence is very similar: $S_\beta^2 \cap (H_\alpha + z_\alpha^2) = \emptyset$ for $\beta \leq \alpha < \omega_1$ by the choice of z_α^2 . For $\beta > \alpha$ we show that elements of S_β^1 are random over N_α and the above argument applies. \square

Remark. Notice that small modification of the above argument yields that if the ideal of null sets has a basis of size ω_1 then every Sierpinski set can be decomposed into two strongly meager sets.

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