One other thought.

IDL may become confused if you open the same HDF file (even for
read-only) multiple times without closing it. This often happens when
you have a procedure which opens the HDF file at the beginning and
closes it at the end, but is crashing somewhere in the middle. As you
edit and recompile the procedure, the net result is that the file gets
opened multiple times without ever being closed.

Cheers,
Liam.