

AstraLux Checklist: Short Version (one page)

Felix Hormuth, hormuth@mpia.de, February 2008

1 Afternoon Tasks

- Check that the raw data has been copied to your hard-disk correctly.
Copy the pipeline output files.
- Prepare next hard-disk for raw data storage so you don't have to do this in the morning.
- Stop pipeline, clean pipeline and raw data directories on the pipeline machine `apipe` and on the Windows machine `pleione`. Make really sure that you have copied / saved all data!
Restart pipeline.
- Check for sufficient hard-disk space on pipeline machine and Windows.
- If you changed any filters, edit the filter list of the filter wheel GUI accordingly.

2 Evening Startup

- On `xt22` in the control room, set up the remote connection to the camera, the telescope tools, and the pipeline. If still running, you should restart the pipeline and receiver, otherwise newly arriving files may not be processed! If this is not your first night, most of it will probably already be running.
- Set CCD temperature to -75°C . Wait until this value has been reached before starting any acquisitions. Will take <10 min.
- Proceed with normal telescope and dome startup sequence while camera cools down.
- If possible: get sky-flats for all filters you intend to use. Otherwise get dome flats. Use the flat-field configuration of the CCD.
- Load the Lucky Imaging configuration (`LuckyImaging.cfg`) afterwards, check that CCD shutter is open.
- Find focus.

3 Morning Shutdown

- Perform normal telescope, auto-guider, and dome shutdown.
- Set CCD cooler temperature to 0°C . Do not switch off cooler.
- Start copying the raw data directory to your external hard-disk as user `astraoobs` on `apipe`.
- Close unnecessary windows on the `xt22` terminal! Do not leave e.g. a Firefox open!

4 Ending your observing run

- Check that you have copied all the data you need! There is no guarantee that backups will be kept on the mountain!

AstraLux Checklist: Extended Version (five pages)

Felix Hormuth, hormuth@mpia.de, February 2008

1 Afternoon Tasks

- Check that the raw data has been copied to your harddisk correctly.

Copy the pipeline output files:

- `cd /disk-a/ASTRALUX`
- `cp -rv AstraLux_output /media/<yourdiskname>/<yourpath>`
- `cp -rv AstraLux_header /media/<yourdiskname>/<yourpath>`
- `cp -rv AstraLux_calib /media/<yourdiskname>/<yourpath>`

Instead of copying to an external harddisk you can also create your own directory under `/disk-a/ASTRALUX`, but do not forget to move the data from the pipeline machine at some point! Alternatively you may transfer the output data (typically <1 GB) per night via network to your laptop. Use secure FTP (`sftp`) for this purpose, logging in as `astraobs@apipe`

- Prepare next harddisk for raw data storage so you don't have to do this in the morning.
 - Go (physically) to the pipeline machine `apipe` on the first floor of the dome building.
 - Log in locally (left screen/keyboard) as `astraobs` if not already / still logged in.
 - Click once on the 'My Computer' icon. A window should open up showing you all connected physical, logical, and network drives on the right side. External USB harddisks will appear at the end of this list.
 - If you want to unmount a disk, open the popup menu by clicking once with the right mouse button on the drive name in this list. Select 'Safely remove'.
 - Check in a terminal window with `df -h` that this disk does really not appear anymore in the drive list.
 - Disconnect disk.
 - Connect new disk. If you are prompted for any actions like executing an autorun file found on your drive, select always 'No' or 'Cancel'.
 - The drive should now be listed in the 'My Computer' window. If you do a `df -h` in a terminal, the full mount path (usually starting with `/media/` should appear at the end of the list.
- Stop pipeline, clean pipeline and raw data directories on the pipeline machine `apipe` and on the Windows machine `pleione`. Make really sure that you have copied / saved all data! Restart pipeline.
 - As user `astraobs` on `apipe`, execute `kill_astralux` at the shell prompt.
 - In the Remote Desktop Window (the camera window), minimise the camera screen (pinned window bar at the top of the screen, left icon). This should bring you back to the desktop of the first Windows machine, `pleione`. You'll see that you are on the right desktop if there is the icon for the connection to `asterope` and no icons for camera or filter wheel software.
 - Open a Windows explorer window ('My Computer' icon. Go the drive `S:\` and into the directory `AstraLux_input`. Delete all files you find there, and don't forget to empty the Window trash bin afterwards!

- As user `astraoobs` on `apipe`, clean the pipeline directories:
 - * `cd /disk-a/ASTRALUX`
 - * `rm AstraLux_output/*`
 - * `rm AstraLux_calib/*`
 - * `rm AstraLux_header/*`
 - * `cd /disk-b/ASTRALUX`
 - * `rm AstraLux_input/*`
- As user `astraoobs` on `apipe`, execute `start_astralux` at the shell prompt.
- Check for sufficient haddisk space on pipeline machine and Windows machine `pleione`.
 - The drive `S:\` should not be used for storage purposes! By clearing it in the previous step everything should be fine.
 - As `astraoobs` on `apipe`, type `df -h` at the shell prompt. You need at least 500 GB free space on `/disk-b`, 20 GB on `/disk-a` and 5 GB on the root partition.
- If you changed any filters, edit the filter list of the filter wheel GUI accordingly.
 - On the Windows camera machine `asterope`, open the file `C:\iafilters.txt` by double clicking on it in the Windows Explorer.
 - This file contains the filter names for position A to H, one per line. Edit accordingly and be sure to press enter after the last line before saving.
 - Close and restart the filter wheel GUI.

2 Evening Startup

- On `xt22` in the control room, set up the remote connection to the camera, the telescope tools, and the pipeline. If still running, you should restart the pipeline and receiver, otherwise newly arriving files may not be processed! If this is not your first night, most of it will probably already be running. However, here is the full startup sequence if you have to start from scratch:
 - Log in locally at `xt22` (the dual-head system in the SOR) with the `obs2b` account
 - On the **left** screen:
 - * Click on the blue screen symbol in the menu bar – it is the one named “Pleione (AstraLux)”. This opens the remote desktop connection to the Windows machine “pleione” in the dome. Log in as user. Place the remote desktop window in the upper left part of the screen.
 - * On the remote desktop of `pleione`, double-click the icon named “ASTEROPE”. This opens again a remote desktop connection, this time to the camera control computer at the mirror cell. Again log in as user.
 - * On the desktop of `asterope`, start the filter-wheel GUI via the icon named “FILTER”. A log window and the actual control window (you will recognise it, it is the one with large, friendly buttons) pop up. Place the control GUI at the right side of `asterope`’s desktop.
 - * Start the camera software via the icon named “CAMERA”. A splash screen will appear for up to 15 seconds, then you should see the camera control software window. Resize it so that it fills the part of the desktop not occupied by the filter GUI (do not care about the filter log window, you will not need to see it).

* **NEVER EVER START ANY OTHER SOFTWARE ON THE WINDOWS MACHINES DURING OBSERVATIONS!**

Of course, during daytime you can do what you want, but: the real-time display and data transfer during observations need quite some resources, and any other software can heavily interfere. Don't complain if your acquisition crashes because you started "just" the Windows explorer...

- * Open a terminal window. Log in to ultra3 as obs22 with:

```
ssh -X obs22@ultra3
```

- * (Re)start the telescope command server with `start_teleserver`. Some output will appear, but the command line will not be blocked.

- * Start the "paddle", i.e. the GUI for fine-positioning the telescope:

```
/disk-a/staff/CONTROL_PADDLE22/start_raqueta22 &
```

Move the appearing GUI into the upper right corner of the screen. Minimise the terminal window.

– On the **right** screen:

- * Open a terminal window, log in again to ultra3 as obs22:

```
ssh -X obs22@ultra3
```

- * Start the dome control GUI:

```
start_domec &
```

- * Start the flat-field lamp GUI:

```
ffl &
```

- * Open a new tab in this terminal window (icon in the lower left corner), log in to the AstraLux pipeline machine `apipe` as `astraoobs`:

```
ssh -X astraoobs@apipe
```

- * Start the whole holy suite of IDL programs with just one command:

```
start_astralux
```

Simple, isn't it? This should now magically fill the remaining free desktop space of the left screen, and almost completely clutter the right screen. The free space left of the webcam window "CAHA NETEYES" is reserved for the dome control, move this window there so that you can see the red/green status display during the observations.

- Set CCD temperature to -75°C . Wait until this value has been reached before starting any acquisitions. Will take <10 min.

- In the camera software, select Hardware \rightarrow Temperature.

- Switch Cooler to 'On', set temperature to -75°C .

- Close cooler control window.

- Proceed with normal telescope and dome startup sequence while camera cools down:

- Open dome.

- Switch on hydraulics first, then telescope drives in the dome control software.

- Press 'Startup' in the telescope control software.

- Switch on 'Tracking', set dome to 'Auto'.

- If possible: get sky-flats for all filters you intend to use. Otherwise get dome flats. Use the Flat-field configuration of the CCD.

- Load flat-field configuration: In the camera software, select File \rightarrow Configuration Files \rightarrow Load, choose `Flatfield.cfg`.

- Check that the CCD shutter is open.

- Change to the SDSS z' filter.
- Start live display. Adjust exposure time until you get ≈ 5000 counts.
- Close shutter – you will need a dark frame first.
- In the acquisition setup, set the number of desired frames ('Kinetic series length') to 50.
- Set the spool-file name for the dark/bias acquisition. Name it `Sky_SDSSz_Flat_Bias`. While you can change `Sky` to something else if you want, the rest of the filename is mandatory to allow correct pipeline processing.
- Start acquisition, this will now produce the master-dark for your flat-field.
- Open shutter.
- In the acquisition setup, remove the suffix `_Bias` from the spool-file name.
- Start acquisition. Now the pipeline will produce a master-flat if you did anything right.
- Change to the SDSS i' filter, repeat sequence, including the acquisition of a new dark cube. So not forget to change the filenames accordingly by replacing `SDSSi` with `SDSSz`.
- Load load the Lucky Imaging configuration (`LuckyImaging.cfg`) afterwards, check that CCD shutter is open.
- Find focus.
 - Set telescope to an initial focus position according to this formula:

$$\text{alrightFocus}[mm] = 23.31 - 0.09 \cdot T_{Dome} \quad (1)$$

Here T_{Dome} is the dome temperature displayed by the Meteo Monitor. The above formula is valid for the SDSS filters.

- Point telescope to a star of 5–8 mag. Use the SDSS z' filter.
- Set electron gain to a medium value (e.g. 200).
- Start camera live display.
- Find object. Depending on the position on the sky, the pointing may be off by few 10 arcseconds. Use the paddle application on the left screen to apply offsets of $\pm 50''$ in RA and Dec, use the coordinate difference display of the telescope control to do that systematically.
- Adjust electron gain so that the greyscale cuts of the live display peak at ≈ 7000 ADU.
- Apply focus steps of ± 0.1 mm to find a rough focus, then use ± 0.05 and ± 0.025 to find the final best focus. If you are a first-time user of AstraLux, practice that! You will see that your own eyes are pretty good in determining the best focus position. Under bad seeing conditions ($> 1''$), you will probably not be able to see significant differences for steps smaller than 0.05 mm, but this is alright. The atmospheric (de)focus term will be larger than the telescope defocus anyway.
- If you use other filters than SDSS i' and z' : do not forget to refocus!

3 Morning Shutdown

- Perform normal telescope, auto-guider, and dome shutdown.
 - Type `quit` in the auto-guider shell.
 - Press Shutdown in the telescope software.

- When the telescope has stopped, switch off drives first, then hydraulics in the dome control software.
- Set CCD cooler temperature to 0°C. Do not switch off cooler.
 - Select Hardware -> Temperature in the camera software, set temperature to 0°C, but leave 'Cooler' at 'On'.
- Start copying the raw data directory to your external hddisk as user astraobs on apipe:
 - `cd /disk-b/ASTRALUX`
 - `cp -rv AstraLux_input /media/<yourdiskname>/<yourpath>`
- Close unnecessary windows on the xt22 terminal! Do not leave e.g. a Firefox open!

4 Ending your observing run

- Check that you have copied all the data you need! There is no guarantee that backups will be kept on the mountain!

AstraLux User's Guide

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April 2008 update by Stefan Hippler, hippler@mpia.de

AstraLux Homepage: <http://www.MPIA.de/ASTRALUX>

Observatory webpages: <http://w3.caha.es/sanchez/astralux>



Photographs: AstraLux and the Calar Alto 2.2 m telescope. a) The instrument at the Cassegrain focus. The AstraLux camera is attached to the – now painted yellow – Instrumentenansatz IA 1 below the TV guider. The electronics rack to the right houses the camera control computer, a monitor/keyboard combination and the filter wheel control electronics. b) The 2.2 m telescope building on a perfect Andalusian summer's day. c) The 2.2 m telescope, pointing to the pole.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of this document

AstraLux is the Calar Alto 2.2 m Lucky Imaging camera. With a pixel scale of 47 mas it allows nearly diffraction limited imaging at wavelengths longwards of 800 nm over a field of view of 512×512 pixels. The heart of the instrument is an electron multiplying high speed CCD (EMCCD) with virtually zero readout noise.

This document does not intend to give a thorough description of the instrument or the Lucky Imaging observing technique. For more information about these topics you may look into the diploma thesis of Felix Hormuth which had AstraLux as its main topic or read the PhD theses of Bob Tubbs and Nicholas Law which describe similar instruments and give valuable information about the Lucky Imaging technique in general and specific data processing steps.

For a description of the daily task to be performed during / before observations, please see the separate checklists.

1.2 Recommended reading

For a general introduction to Lucky Imaging and the AstraLux instrument, you may have a look at the following sections of the AstraLux diploma thesis, which is available as hardcopy at Calar Alto or as PDF file at the AstraLux homepage <http://www.mpia.de/ASTRALUX>:

Section	Pages	Topic
1.5.3	14–18	Lucky Imaging: what is it, why does it work, which filters make sense to use
3.2	28–31	EMCCDs: how do they work, peculiarities
3.3.2	32–43	AstraLux camera characteristics: gain, linearity, noise, etc.
4.3	50–53	Pipeline steps, e.g. quality assessment, image reconstruction
5.2.5	65–66	Atmospheric dispersion effects
5.4.1-5.4.2	68–71	Temporal characteristics, correlation times
5.5.1	75	Isoplanatic angle
5.5.2	76	Reference star magnitude requirements
6.4	86–87	Recommendations for the astrometric calibration of AstraLux

Astronomers who want to know more about the data quality and examples of observational results might read Chapters 5 and 7 in full length.

The PhD theses of Bob Tubbs and Nicholas Law can be found via the Cambridge LuckyCam Homepage at http://www.ast.cam.ac.uk/~optics/Lucky_Web_Site/references.htm.

2 The AstraLux network: computers and accounts

See separate sheet for passwords!

The AstraLux hardware can be split into three segments: one is made up by the camera computer and electronics at the mirror cell, the second by one Windows computer and the Linux pipeline machine on first floor of the dome building. The third segment is actually not exclusively attributed to AstraLux, but is the dual-head terminal xt22 in the remote control room which is used for observations with e.g. CAFOS also.

In the current layout (see Fig. 9), data transfer between the camera and the other machines in the dome is accomplished by an exclusive 1 GBit duplex fibre connection between the camera computer Asterope and the Windows machine Pleione. This connection is only used for raw data transfer and remote control. No other machine in the network than Pleione can see the camera computer Asterope, and only a private network is used.

The built-in 1 GBit copper Ethernet port of Pleione is connected to an 8-port 1 GBit switch in the control room. The pipeline computer `apipe` and the network storage server `astraserv` connect to the same switch. This switch also provides the connection to the general Calar Alto network.

Using the fibre link exclusively for the raw data transfer and remote control of the camera guarantees sufficient network performance, even if the pipeline computer accesses data on Pleione during a running acquisition. It ensures that the camera computer cannot be disturbed or slowed down by external network traffic.

Here is a summary of the machines which are used in the context of AstraLux observations, the tasks of these machines, and which usernames apply:

Name	Location	OS	Login	Purpose
xt22	Control room	Linux	obs2b	Local account, only used to connect further to the other machines.
apipe	Dome, 1st floor	Linux	astraobs	Pipeline, data storage, connection point for external harddisks.
pleione	Dome, 1st floor	Windows	user	Raw data storage, remote connection to camera computer
asterope	Mirror cell	Windows	user	Direct camera control. Can only be connected via pleione.
ultra3	Dome, 1st floor	Sun OS	obs22	Telescope paddle, rotator, catalogue tool
astraserv	Dome, 1st floor	(custom)	(none)	2TB network storage server

IMPORTANT NOTE! IMPORTANT NOTE! IMPORTANT NOTE!

A crucial point for the automatic processing of raw data by the quicklook pipeline is the network connection between `apipe` and Pleione. The raw data directory on Pleione has to be mounted at `/pleione1` in the pipeline machine's filesystem. *This may not be the case after a reboot!*

At the beginning of an observing run you should therefore do a `ls /pleione1` on the pipeline machine. If you can see the directory `AstraLux_input` and the file `lastfilter.txt`, everything is fine. If not, execute the command `mount_shares` as the pipeline user `astraobs` on `apipe`. If this does not succeed, it may be necessary to reboot both the Windows machine Pleione as well as the pipeline machine before retrying.

IMPORTANT NOTE! IMPORTANT NOTE! IMPORTANT NOTE!

3 Filter Setup

3.1 Standard filters

The filter wheel FI-8 in the instrument adapter holds up to 8 filters with 50 mm diameter. All existing CAFOS-compatible filters can be used, including the new SDSS i' and z' filters.

Please note: the filters are in the original $f/8$ beam, hence filters with different thickness require refocusing.

Lucky Imaging observations are performed in the Johnson I , SDSS i' , or z' band. In addition, the Johnson $UBVR$ filters may be used for photometric applications. The remaining filter position can be filled with

e.g. a *GG 385* longpass for (nearly) unfiltered high speed photometry of faint objects or acquisition purposes. Though the camera is sensitive at wavelengths well shorter than 385 nm, using a completely open filter position should be avoided to limit atmospheric dispersion effects to an acceptable level.

The suggested standard configuration of the filter wheel is:

Pos.	Filter	GUI name	Thickness [mm]	λ_{cen} [nm]	FWHM [nm]
A	<i>GG 385</i>	GG385	3	667	474
B	<i>U</i>	JohnsonU	3	372	50
C	<i>B</i>	JohnsonB	3	474	87
D	<i>V</i>	JohnsonV	3	547	108
E	<i>R</i>	JohnsonR	3	644	147
F	<i>I</i>	JohnsonI	3	873	150
G	<i>i'</i>	SDSSi	5	766	136
H	<i>z'</i>	SDSSz	5	912	100

Table 1. *Standard filters for AstraLux. The UBVR filters are taken from the Rösler set (ex 1.23m). The I filter is usually mounted in CAFOS and is a single 3 mm RG 780 glass. Central wavelengths and FWHM refer to the convolution of filter transmission with camera quantum efficiency and atmospheric transmission profile. See also Appendix B of the AstraLux thesis for filter curves. The GUI name refers to the correct entry in the wheel control GUI filter list. Only these names are recognised by the pipeline and correctly attributed to the corresponding filter properties.*

3.2 Filter GUI

The filter GUI is pretty straightforward. The only configuration task that has to be performed is to let the GUI know which filters are installed. The filter names are stored on the local hard-disk of the camera computer Asterope in the file `C:\iafilters.txt`. This file contains one filter name per line for each filter position A to H. The last line should be followed by a carriage return (press enter). The filter names are displayed in the filter GUI and will also appear in the FITS headers containing the telescope data.

The properties of the filters listed in Table 1 are known to the pipeline in the sense that approximate Strehl values can be computed on an absolute scale, at least for the *R-z'* filters. You have to stick to the filter names given in Table 1 for this purpose. If you use other filters, the pipeline will on default fall back to SDSS *z'*. This will affect the accuracy of the absolute Strehl measurements but not the image selection process.

4 Camera operation

Foreword: this section will not cover *all* possible settings and options of the camera software, but only the ones you will need for Lucky Imaging observations. Feel free to play around with the software and to use the online help to get acquainted with it. You cannot damage anything. Just one word of caution: if you are prompted to save something, just say no... Otherwise you might overwrite configuration files or produce large data files where they are not supposed to be saved.

4.1 The most important icons

Here is an overview of the menubar icons you will probably want to use:



Start live display. This does not save any data.



This starts the acquisition, data is spooled to a fits cube with the name defined in the 'Spooling' tab in the camera setup window. The acquisition will stop when the desired number of frames has been reached (Kinetic series length) or when you press the abort button.



Stop the live display or abort a running acquisition.



Open the acquisition setup dialogue, needed to set the save filename, to set the number of frames, and to chose the field of view.



Open the EM-gain and exposure time slider window.



Open the shutter control window. Not available during acquisition or running live display.



Reset the display section to the full image.



Fix the greylevel cuts at the current values. Click again to release cuts and restore min/max scaling.



Fix the greylevel cuts at the current values. Click again to release cuts and restore min/max scaling.

4.2 Loading configurations

The software allows to set a lot of options. In fact most of them should not be changed unless you very exactly know what you are doing. For the two main applications, namely Lucky Imaging in low light conditions and flat-fielding with high SNR, there are two readily available configurations. They can be accessed via the menu by choosing Files --> Configuration Files --> Load. See also extended checklist document.

4.3 Live display

This is probably the most useful thing about AstraLux: what you see is what you get. The live display (see Fig. 1) also allows you to check the illumination level: you can point the crosshair cursor by clicking with the mouse somewhere in the image to see position and counts in the bottom status bar of the live display. You may use the cursor keys to move the crosshair cursor by single pixel steps. By holding the left mouse button pressed you can draw a rectangle somewhere in the image area. When you release the mouse, the display will zoom in to this region.

The 'Reset' icon will bring you back to full field display. Above the live display you will see the actual greyscale cuts – default is automatic min/max scaling. If you look at the right end of the scale you can determine the approximate maximum count level – an easy way to check if you should increase or lower gain or exposure time. If you fix the cuts via the icon in the menu bar, you can use the arrows at the left and right end of the greyscale bar to manually change the cuts.

By clicking with the right mouse button into the image area, you get a pop menu that contains the submenu 'Palettes'. Here you can choose differently coloured lookup tables.

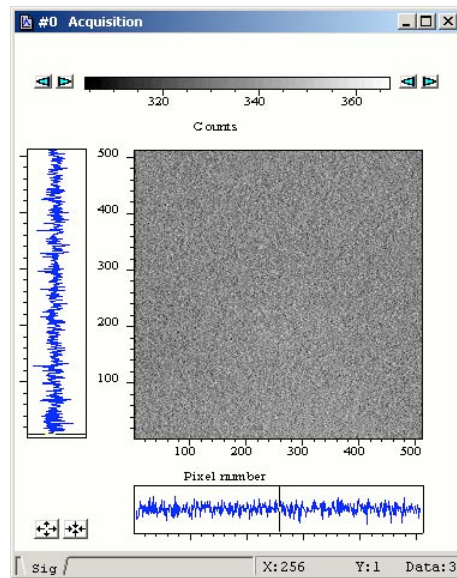


Figure 1. *The live display*

4.4 Slider window

The slider window (see Fig. 2) gives you easy access to the electron multiplication (EM) gain and exposure time setting. You can use the mouse to drag the sliders or type values directly into the fields below them. You can in principal switch off the EM amplifier here, but you shouldn't. The EM gain slider is disabled if the conventional amplifier is in use. Please note that the EM setting here is *not* the physical gain and that it is not linearly related to it! See the AstraLux thesis for typical gain curves for different temperatures.

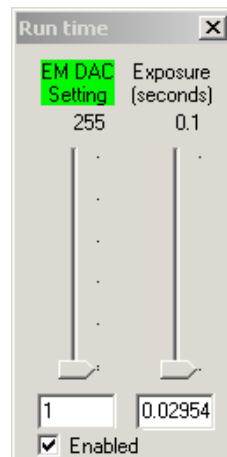


Figure 2. *The slider control window for exposure time and EM gain.*

4.5 Shutter

In the shutter control window (see Fig. 3), opened via the shutter icon, only two settings are of interest: either 'Permanently open' or 'Permanently closed'. The latter is used for dark/bias acquisitions, otherwise the shutter can be left open. Do not change any other settings here!

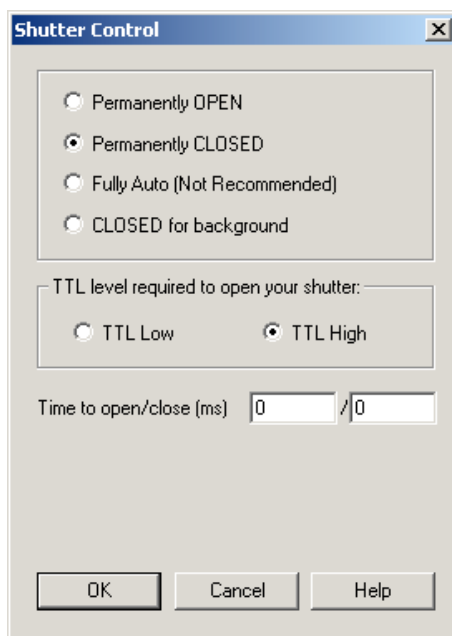


Figure 3. *The shutter control window*

4.6 Cooling

To switch on/off the CCD cooler and to set the desired temperature, select Hardware -> Temperature. This will open up the cooling control window (see Fig. 4). The standard CCD temperature to be used

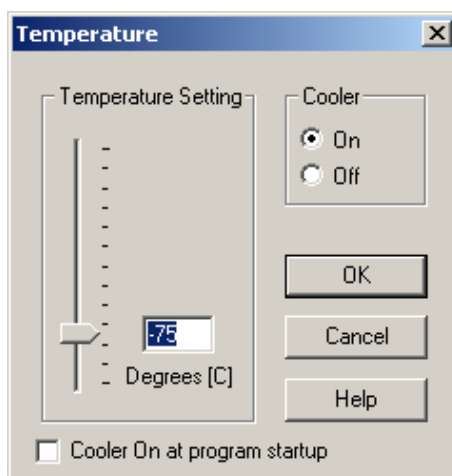


Figure 4. *Cooler control window*

is -75°C . This value can be maintained even in warm summer nights. For security reasons, please leave the option 'Cooler On at program startup' unselected. Cooling down from $+20^{\circ}\text{C}$ takes ≈ 10 minutes, the progress can be monitored via the temperature display in the lower left corner of the camera software. A red background means that the current temperature is different from the requested one or that it is not stabilised yet. Wait until the background turns to blue before starting with acquisitions. Please note that the temperature display is not updated during acquisition or while the live display is running.

If the temperature display turns to 'OFF' or shows a different value than -75°C during the night, there may be a hardware problem. Either the power supply of the camera has been disconnected or the camera is not able to get the heat of the Peltier cooler out of the housing – which could happen if e.g. the camera fan fails. In this case please check immediately directly at the instrument what happened. In case you hear a persistent

loud beep, this is the temperature fuse that has triggered due to overheating and switched off the cooler. At a temperature set-point of -75°C this will never happen in free air even in summer, so this is indicator for a serious problem with the cooling system. Especially after very long acquisition sequences the background colour of the temperature display may sometimes change to red for a couple of minutes.

At the end of observations, please set the temperature to 0°C . **Do not simply switch off the cooler.**

4.7 Acquisition setup

The acquisition setup dialogue offers a lot of options and has multiple tabs. In fact, only few have to be ever touched and it is recommended to leave all other settings unchanged. All options not mentioned in the following should not be touched! In case you mess something up, you can reload the appropriate configuration.

The tab 'Setup CCD' (see Fig. 5) offers three important options. Firstly, you can set here the exposure time for the single frames – this is equivalent to doing so in the slider window. Secondly, here you have to enter the number of desired frames in the field 'Kinetic series length'. Thirdly, you can switch off and on the Frame Transfer mode of the camera. In *frame transfer mode*, the imaging area of the CCD is exposed while the last image is read out. This gives you nearly 100% duty cycle, but limits the minimum possible exposure time to the readout time. If you need shorter exposure times, you can either use a smaller FoV, because this will be read out faster, or switch off the Frame Transfer mode. This will allow in principle exposure times as short as 10 microseconds, but at a cost of a reduced duty cycle. Do not touch anything else in this dialogue unless you are sure what you are doing!

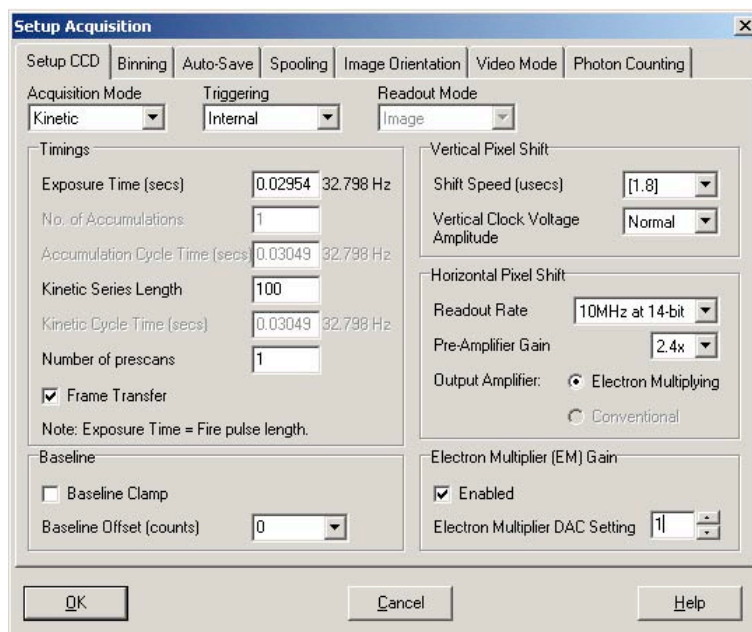


Figure 5. CCD setup dialogue

The tab 'Binning' (see Fig. 6) allows you in principle to activate pixel binning – not useful at all for diffraction limited imaging. The important part is on the left side. Here you can select either to use the full FoV with 512×512 pixel or a sub-array of 256×256 pixel (smaller areas are also possible but not recommended). If you select a sub-array you can drag the green rectangle to position it freely on chip. It is recommended to use one of the *right* quadrants and to stick to it whenever you use the small FoV. First, less free parameters are always good for reproducibility, secondly, column 242 of a CCD has a small charge trap. Using the *right* part of the CCD will exclude this column from the FoV.

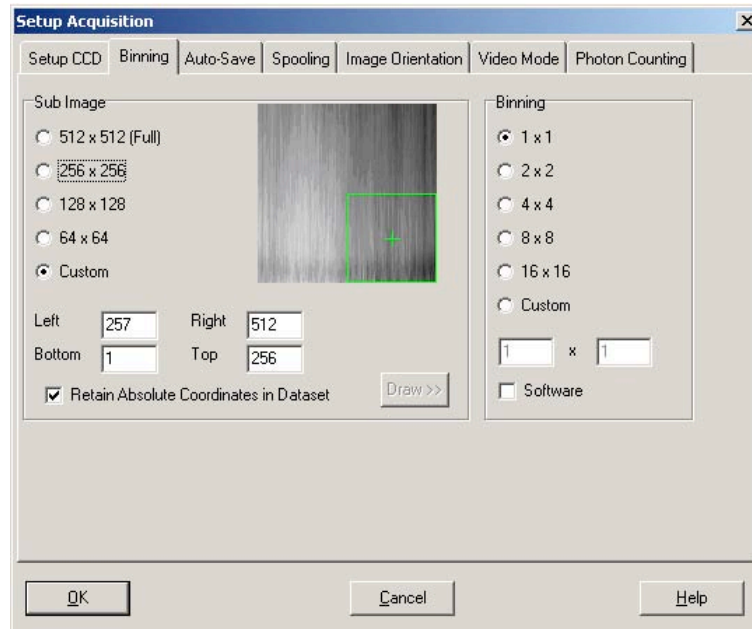


Figure 6. *The sub-array selection dialogue.*

The tab 'Spooling' (see Fig. 7) is finally used to set the filename of the output data cube(s). See below for filename conventions. Never change the path in this window, only the field 'File Name'! Otherwise the pipeline will have a very hard time finding your data. Don't touch anything else here.

You have to use a new filename for each acquisition you start! Do not overwrite existing files!

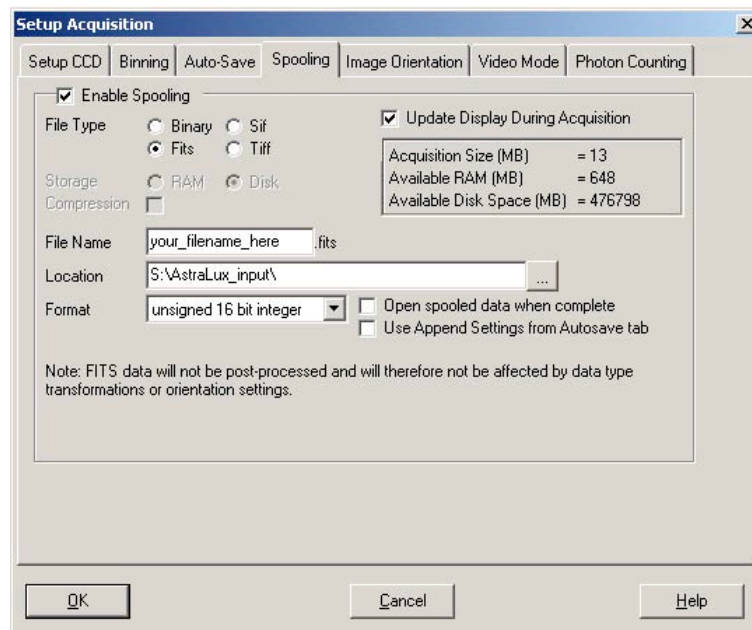


Figure 7. *Set your filename in the Spooling dialogue.*

Feel free to have a look at the other tabs of the configuration dialogue or to consult the software's help to read more about the possibilities.

If you have configured everything as desired, you can now start the acquisition with the camera-like icon from the menu bar. During acquisition you will see the number of acquired frames counting up in the bottom status bar of the camera software. Sometimes this display will not appear or seem to be frozen. In this case it will help to click once somewhere in the menu (e.g. on 'Files') without actually selecting anything.

Especially when using the full FoV the counter may get updated more frequently if you resize the live display a bit, it will eat up all available display bandwidth if it is too large.

5 Quick guide to Lucky Imaging

5.1 Filename conventions

- Important rule: NEVER OVERWRITE AN EXISTING FILE! The pipeline/receiver will not be able to deal with this. If you have to abort and restart an acquisition, use a new filename (e.g. my-target_2ndtry_SDSSi after you aborted my-target_SDSSi).
- Put the filter name in the filename! Firstly, this will make it much easier for you to find the right files later on hard-disk, secondly the pipeline relies to some extent on this information. Just add a `_filename` to each spooling filename, where `filename` is the name that appears in the filter wheel GUI.
- If you don't want the pipeline to attempt to reduce a specific dataset (e.g. because you just acquired a few images of a photometric standard), then use the suffixes `'_test'` or `'_phot'`.
- If you want the pipeline to produce a master bias from a dark cube, then add the suffix `'_Bias'`.
- For flat-fields, use `'_Flat'` accordingly
- If you take the bias for a flat-field, use `_Flat_Bias` (see also checklist).

5.2 Flat-fields

You should obtain a flat-field cube with *at least 50 frames* in it for each filter you want to use later. Sky-flats are superior to dome-flats. Please remember that you have very small pixels – you have to start right after sunset with flat-fielding if you want to have a good SNR in the z' band! A good SNR is usually reached if you have at least 4000 counts in the live display.

Since flat-fielding is done in high SNR conditions, you should use the *conventional* amplifier – a suitable configuration file is provided, see checklist. The flat-fields can safely applied to data obtained through the electron amplifier output. But please note that the horizontal readout direction is reversed between these two outputs! The quicklook pipeline *accounts for this effect* and will also automatically select the right region of the flat-field when observing with a sub-array of the chip. *You therefore only need flat-fields for the full field of view.*

5.3 To bias or not to bias

If you take flat-fields you will certainly need an accurate bias acquisition – otherwise you will have a hard time with applying this flat-field, and the pipeline will refuse to generate a master-flat anyway if it cannot find an appropriate bias cube.

In the case of science cubes obtained in Lucky Imaging mode, it is however usually not necessary to obtain a dedicated bias cube for each science target. In fact most pixels of your science cube will contain nothing else than blank sky, and these are perfectly suited to determine bias level and bias structure from the science data itself – see Nicholas Law's PhD thesis for a prescription how to do this.

5.4 Use the right FoV

Only if you absolutely need the full $24\times 24''$ FoV you may use it! Otherwise you are better off by using only 256×256 pixels. This will allow shorter exposure times, give you less blank sky and hence less raw data to handle with, and the quicklook pipeline will be much faster. Do not use smaller fields, since this can cause problems when the reference star gets too close to the image border.

Use one of the right side quadrants of the CCD for the small FoV and stick to your choice throughout your run. Changing as few parameters as possible is always good. Best is to check while flat-fielding which quadrant is least affected by dust.

5.5 Finding the right gain and exposure time

Golden rule: use the shortest possible exposure time in frame transfer mode. This will give you a better temporal sampling of the speckle pattern. This is one more reason why you should prefer the small FoV if possible: you can use 15 ms instead of 29 ms minimum exposure time. Of course, if your target is rather dim and you are already using the maximum EM gain setting of 255, then you have to increase the exposure time. As a rule of thumb, the maximum count value should be around 7000 ADU, i.e. the greyscale bar in the live display should only occasionally show the number 7000. You can also open a histogram display, as this will show the maximum count value. To do so, start first the live display. Then click on the icon with the two read peaks in the right part of the icon bar (image to be added above...). At the low flux end it is not so simple. Also as a rule of thumb, your reference target should always be easily visible on the live display. Otherwise you will get a very strange PSF with all noise coherently added to the central pixel. Be encouraged to test with a faint target what happens if you choose different exposure times. Try to get a feeling for the signal levels you need to get a useful result. You might e.g. experiment with a known binary to see how the exposure time selection affects resolution, PSF shape, and Strehl ratio.

If you need to observe very bright targets, you might have to switch off the Frame Transfer mode in the Acquisition Setup dialogue. This will allow you to use exposure times down to <1 ms at the cost of a reduced duty cycle of the camera.

5.6 How many frames to acquire

This is basically determined by the effective exposure time you want to achieve. At a 10% selection rate and with 10000 frames with 30 ms exposure time you will have e.g. 30 s worth of integration time in your final result. At the lower end, you should avoid to acquire less than 2000 frames. Doing so guarantees that you sample a reasonable span of atmospheric turbulence variation and will reduce any static aberrations in the final results.

5.7 Photometry: a thorny issue

The electron gain setting is not linearly related to the physical electron gain, and the actual gain also depends on the temperature. If you want to determine e.g. the $i'-z'$ colour of an object, it is there best first to observe it in i' , since you usually get more counts here, and then to observe it in z' **without changing the gain**. If you need not only the colour, but also the magnitude, the optimum strategy would be to observe a photometric standard using the *same gain* afterwards.

You can also calibrate the EM gain curve by observing the same star with different EM gain settings. This should allow you to do all-sky photometry with at least 10 % accuracy.

6 Preparing the control desktops

!!! See also extended checklist for daily preparation !!!

- Log in *locally* at xt22 (the dual-head system in the SOR) with the obs2b account.
- On the **left** screen:
 - Click on the blue screen symbol in the menu bar – it is the one named “Pleione (AstraLux)”. This opens the remote desktop connection to the Windows machine ”Pleione” in the dome. Log in as user. Place the remote desktop window in the upper left part of the screen.
 - On the remote desktop of Pleione, double-click the icon named “ASTEROPE”. This opens again a remote desktop connection, this time to the camera control computer at the mirror cell. Again log in as user.
 - On the desktop of Asterope, start the filter-wheel GUI via the icon named “FILTER”. A log window and the actual control window (you will recognise it, it is the one with large, friendly buttons) pop up. Place the control GUI at the right side of Asterope’s desktop.
 - Start the camera software via the icon named “CAMERA”. A splash screen will appear for up to 15 seconds, then you should see the camera control software window. Resize it so that it fills the part of the desktop not occupied by the filter GUI (do not care about the filter log window, you will not need to see it).
 - **NEVER EVER START ANY OTHER SOFTWARE ON THE WINDOWS MACHINES DURING OBSERVATIONS!**
Of course, during daytime you can do what you want, but: the real-time display and data transfer during observations need quite some resources, and any other software can heavily interfere. Don’t complain if your acquisition crashes because you started “just” the Windows explorer...
 - Open a terminal window. Log in to ultra3 as obs22 with:
`ssh -X obs22@ultra3`
 - (Re)start the telescope command server with `start_teleserver`. Some output will appear, but the command line will not be blocked.
 - Start the “paddle”, i.e. the GUI for fine-positioning the telescope:
`/disk-a/staff/CONTROL_PADDLE22/start_raqueta22 &`
Move the appearing GUI into the upper right corner of the screen. Minimise the terminal window.
- On the **right** screen:
 - Open a terminal window, log in again to ultra3 as obs22:
`ssh -X obs22@ultra3`
 - Start the dome control GUI:
`start_domec &`
 - Start the flat-field lamp GUI:
`ffl &`
 - Open a new tab in this terminal window (icon in the lower left corner), log in to the AstraLux pipeline machine `apipe` as `astraobs`:
`ssh -X astraobs@apipe`
 - Start the whole holy suite of IDL programs with just one command:
`start_astralux`
Simple, isn’t it? This should now magically fill the remaining free desktop space of the left screen, and almost completely clutter the right screen. The free space left of the webcam window “CAHA NETEYES” is reserved for the dome control, move this window there so that you can see the red/green status display during the observations.
- If you did all as told, your screens should now look approximately like in Fig. 8.

7 The AstraLux applications & windows

This is a brief overview of the pipeline & helper applications started with the last command. Please note that they can be individually started/stopped, see Troubleshooting section.

7.1 AstraLux File Receiver

The receiver monitors the raw data directory on the windows machine Pleione. Each time a new FITS file is created, the message >>>ACQSTART<<< is printed, a sound is played, and all vital telescope parameters are retrieved. These are saved as FITS header in the AstraLux_header directory, using TELHDR as prefix in front of the FITS file name specified in the camera software. If a new FITS cube of the same acquisition is started, a short sound will be played, and a message printed. When an acquisition is finished, you will see the message <<< ACQEND >>>, and – guess what – hear a sound. Each time a FITS file is finished (not only after the complete acquisition), the header of this file is extracted and stored away in the header directory with the prefix CAMHDR. What is more important: each finished FITS file is scheduled for FTP transfer to the pipeline machine. If all cubes belonging to a specific observations have been received, the quicklook pipeline will be triggered. If you abort an acquisition in the camera software, the receiver will recognise this when you start the next one (and of course: play a sound!).

7.2 AstraLux Data Transfer Monitor

This logs the the activity of the so-called FIFO command execution script. This piece of software watches a directory for the arrival of time-stamped text files and simply executes the commands saved in these files in the correct temporal order – one at a time. The FTP transfer of the raw data is handled by this script, ensuring that only one file is retrieved at the same time, and that the quicklook pipeline is not started before all files have been received. The messages you see in this window belong to the `wget` processes retrieving the raw data files. Of some interest is the transfer speed, this should be *on average* >18MB/s

7.3 Meteo Monitor

Originally written to cover the last free pixels of the left screen, this custom weather station has been proven to be quite useful. It gives you not only the basic weather parameters, but also the dome temperature, sky quality and extinction (plus RMS and reference star intensity) – thus saving you from switching desktops to have a look at the Calar Alto weather station website.

Furthermore it displays the last seeing measurement of the ROBODIMM Seeing monitor and shows you average, minimum, maximum, peak-to-peak, and standard deviation of the seeing for the last 5, 15, and 30 minutes (as long as there is sufficient data available for these time spans).

The really nifty thing about the Meteo Monitor are its visual alarms. Parameters exceeding limits for warning and alarms will be displayed with a coloured background. Light blue is usually just a warning, yellow should make you think, and red is definitely serious, e.g. rain, storm, or really ugly seeing. You will also get warnings for large differences between dome and ambient temperature.

7.4 Neteyes

This little window shows the outside webcam, alternating with the four telescope cameras as long as light conditions inside the dome are sufficient.

7.5 Pipeline Windows

The pipeline windows in detail:

- **AstraLux Reference Pick:** this shows a stack of the *first two seconds* of the data cube currently processed. The pipeline will automatically pick the brightest object as the Lucky Imaging reference position and draw a red circle around it. If you see the message 'Click on reference!' at the bottom of this window, the pipeline was not able to find a sufficiently bright reference object. This can be the case if your target is very faint. You have to select a reference manually by clicking with the left mouse button in the window. The content of the reference pick window is saved as a PNG image file for each processed data cube, allowing you to easily reconstruct which object was used as reference.
- **Stacked image:** After the pipeline has measured the image quality of each single frame it will show a plain stack *without* any tip/tilt correction or bias / flat-field processing in this window. This image is also saved as FITS file. A 2D Gauss-fit is performed on the brightest object, and the short-axis FWHM is used to estimate the equivalent seeing in V-band, printed at the bottom of this window. This value may be quite different from the one measured by the DIMM. Especially in summer it can be significantly better, while dome seeing may give you much worse values in winter. In any case, it is the seeing that is relevant for your observation and that you can state in the night report.
- **Tip/Tilt corrected:** NOT YET IMPLEMENTED!
- **Strehl & Reference Statistics:** Here you see a histogram of the Strehl measurements for your reference object, a cumulative plot giving you the cutoff Strehl value, i.e. the lowest Strehl contained in a selection of 10%, 2%, and 1%, and a scatter plot of the reference peak position.
- **Quicklook Pipeline Result:** After final processing this window displays the sqrt-scaled Lucky Imaging result for a 10% selection.
- **Quicklook Pipeline Log:** Here you find diagnostic output which will most likely not be of great interest for the average user. However, if you see nasty IDL error messages, followed by the prompt 'AstraLux>' here, the pipeline has crashed and needs to be restarted.

8 Data types, pipeline products

8.1 Data directories and data products

The following directories are located in the home directory of the pipeline user `astrobs` on the machine `apipe`:

<code>AstraLux_input</code>	raw data cubes
<code>AstraLux_output</code>	quicklook pipeline result files
<code>AstraLux_calib</code>	master flat and master bias files generated by the pipeline
<code>AstraLux_header</code>	camera and telescope header files for each data cube

Please note that these directories are symbolically linked to the home directory of the pipeline user. Doing an 'cp -rv' of such an directory to e.g. a FAT file system on an external hard-disk might therefore only work from the real locations of these directories (`/disk-b/ASTRALUX/` for the raw data, `/disk-a/ASTRALUX/` for the other files).

8.1.1 Contents of AstraLux_input

Here you will find the unmodified raw data cubes as they have been retrieved directly from the primary raw data storage directory on Pleione. These are ordinary 3D FITS files with camera information header, summarising exposure and timing parameters of the CCD.

Since the maximum file size for an individual cube is 2 GB, long acquisitions will be broken down into multiple files. If you e.g. requested 10000 full frames and chose the filename `my-image` in the camera software, you will get three files: `myimage.fits`, `my-image_X2.fits`, and `my-image_X3.fits`, containing 4096, 4096, and 1808 frames. The pipeline pretty well knows how to handle this and how to locate a specific frame.

8.1.2 Contents of AstraLux_output

Here the pipeline will place the *quicklook* data products. Assuming you used `my-image` as filename for a Lucky Imaging observation, you will get the following files:

- `SELECTION_my-image_000.png`: this is a screenshot of the reference selection window, allowing you to reconstruct easily later on, which object was used as Lucky Imaging reference.
- `STACK_my-image_000.fits`: this is the plain seeing and telescope tracking limited stack of all images in the data cube, identical to the image displayed by the pipeline to estimate the seeing.
- `STREHLSTATS_my-image_000.png`: a screenshot of the Strehl statistics window.
- `RATES_my-image_000.xdr`: an IDL structure internally used by the pipeline for image rating and image selection.
- `TDRIZZLE_xxxx_my-image_000.fits`: the pipeline quicklook result. 'xxxx' here stands for the selection rate, expressed in 0.1%. The quicklook pipeline results are produced by applying the drizzle algorithm to the best 1%, 2.5%, 5%, and 10% to all frames. Please note that the pixel scale of the output files is half the physical pixel scale of ≈ 47 mas/px! The signal level in these files is normalised to the single frame exposure time. The bias level is estimated from the science data, and flat-fielding is applied if you obtained a master-flat for the used filter before (see extended checklist for information about taking flat-fields). For a detailed description of the drizzle algorithm, please refer to Fruchter & Hook 2002, PASP 114, 144.
- `WEIGHTS_my-image_000.xdr`: The weight maps produced during drizzling. They can give information how uniform the pixels in the output grid have been "populated".

All filenames end in a three-digit number. This will usually be 000, but will increment in case the pipeline is forced to re-reduce a dataset. Please note that the FITS files have only rudimentary headers. Camera and telescope information is stored in external header files.

8.1.3 Contents of AstraLux_header

Each time a data acquisition is started or a new FITS cube is started, the receiver will retrieve a FITS header with telescope and ambient information from a machine on the Calar Alto network. This FITS header will have the same name as the camera data cube, but with the prefix `TELHDR_`.

Each time a data cube is finished, the camera information FITS header will be extracted and saved with the prefix `CAMHDR_` in this directory.

8.1.4 Contents of AstraLux_calib

This directory contains the master-bias and master-flat file produced and used by the pipeline. They retrieve the prefix 'MASTERBIAS_' and 'MASTERFLAT_', respectively. The pipeline applies a simple sigma-clipping algorithm to the calibration data cubes to filter out cosmics.

8.2 Available storage, minimum free space requirements

In total ≈ 3 GB of hard-disk storage are available for AstraLux. This space can be used to create *temporary* backups of your data, but there is no guarantee that these will last longer than your actual observing run, especially if there are more AstraLux observations scheduled afterwards.

The following disks are available in the AstraLux network – but not all can be used for backup:

Computer	Mount Point	Purpose	Total	Minimum free
Pleione (Windows)	S:	Incoming raw data storage Never use this for backup!	1000GB	500GB
Apipe (Linux)	/disk-b/ASTRALUX/	Incoming raw data storage You can create directories and save raw data temporarily here. The directory AstraLux_input is reserved for the incoming raw data.	1500GB	500GB
Astraserv (Network) mounted on Apipe	/aserv1 to /aserv4	Backup space	4x500GB	0GB

You can freely use the network storage aserv for creating backups. In case these disks are not empty, please check with the staff before you delete any data! Also check how long this data can be kept there if you want to rely on this.

Though the incoming data partition on the Windows machine Pleione is larger than what is required for a single night, it is in general not a good idea to put additional data on it, as this may decrease disk performance and cause trouble during the night.

Under /disk-b/ASTRALUX on apipe you may create own directories to save the nightly raw data or pipeline products. In case the copying of your raw data has failed during the day, you may just move the files from AstraLux_input into a new directory. This allows you to start with observations as usual (as a clean AstraLux_input directory is required every night) without losing time and/or data. You should try to get all data from this disk to your own media before you leave the mountain, as it will be certainly deleted before the next run.

9 Troubleshooting

9.1 Help! I cannot find my target!

Here are the top reasons:

- Telescope pointing is not accurate. Search around the nominal position with the paddle, use coordinate difference display of the telescope control to do it systematically.
- The dome is out of sync and vignettes or totally covers the aperture. Check if the dome azimuth and elevation make sense regarding the telescope coordinates. Ask support astronomer for possible cures to this problem. Report in the night report if it happens annoyingly often.

- Shutter closed. Taken a bias and forgotten to re-open the shutter? Loaded a camera configuration file and forgot to check shutter status?
- Target too faint. Well, you may change to the first filter position, which is usually close to a clear filter any try with longer exposure times. Use the maximum electron gain. But if you cannot see your target in the Sloan filters with reasonably short exposure times <200 ms, it is too faint for Lucky Imaging anyway.

9.2 Camera software crashes

This virtually never happens. Only when severe network problems occur the camera software will not be able to write data in real time to the hard-disk and may crash. You can then try to restart it.

What probably may happen more often is that the remote desktop connection to the Windows machines breaks down and the window disappears from the left screen. The camera software will perfectly continue to run on the Windows machines, and a running acquisition will continue without problems. You can re-establish the remote desktop connection like described in the setup procedures. If the connection is terminated more than once per night you should report this in the night report as it may indicate problems with the Calar Alto network performance.

9.3 Reasons and cures for pipeline crashes

The top reasons for pipeline crashes are reference sources that are too close to the image border or vanishing references due to some movements or clouds. You will usually get a bunch of IDL error messages in the quicklook pipeline log window. While it is in principal possible to gently restart the pipeline from within this window, the following sequence can be executed from the `astraoobs` shell prompt and is more reliable. The pipeline can be stopped and started independently of the receiver or any running acquisitions by using the command `kill_pipeline`. By typing `start_pipeline` it will be restarted. Any observations that have been finished since the pipeline stopped/crashed will not be reduced, the pipeline will continue with the next completed dataset.

9.4 Reasons and cures for receiver problems

If the file receiver does not acknowledge the start or end of an acquisition with appropriate ACQSTART or ACQEND message and sounds, then it is probably stuck in the attempt to retrieve the telescope information for the last cube from one of the Calar Alto computers.

Before restarting the receiver you should wait until any pending data transfers (check the Data Transfer Monitor window) have been completed. It is better not to start any new acquisitions, but first to solve the receiver problem. The first step is to kill the receiver with a `kill_receiver` command at the `astraoobs` pipeline user's shell prompt. This should close the two receiver windows on the left screen. Now you have to manually copy all raw data files that have been missed by the receiver. On the pipeline machine, go to the directory `/pleione1/AstraLux_input`. Look for the data cubes that belong to the last observation. Copy them with a `cp` command to the pipeline input path `/disk-b/ASTRALUX/AstraLux_input`. When this is finished, you have to manually trigger the pipeline to process this observation. Go to the input directory `/disk-b/ASTRALUX/AstraLux_input` and create a file with the name `READY_cubename` where `cubename` is the name of the datafile without the `.fits` suffix by using the `touch` command.

Here is an example: if you chose `Trapezium_SDSSi` as filename and requested 10.000 full frames, you would have to copy first the files

```
Trapezium_SDSSi.fits, Trapezium_SDSSi_X2.fits, and Trapezium_SDSSi_X3.fits to  
/disk-b/ASTRALUX/AstraLux_input  
and then to execute the command
```

`touch READY_Trapezium_SDSSi`

in this directory. While the pipeline should now start processing the data, you can restart the receiver with `start_receiver` from the `astraobs` shell prompt.

9.5 How to restart the Meteo Monitor and the Neteyes application

In case the Neteyes camera display is not updated (typically you should get a new image every 3-5 seconds), or if the green dot in the upper right corner of the Meteo Monitor stops blinking, then you will probably have to kill and restart these applications. To do this, change to the home directory of the `astraobs` pipeline user and type a `kill_meteo`, followed by a `start_meteo`, or a `kill_cameras`, followed by `start_cameras`, respectively.

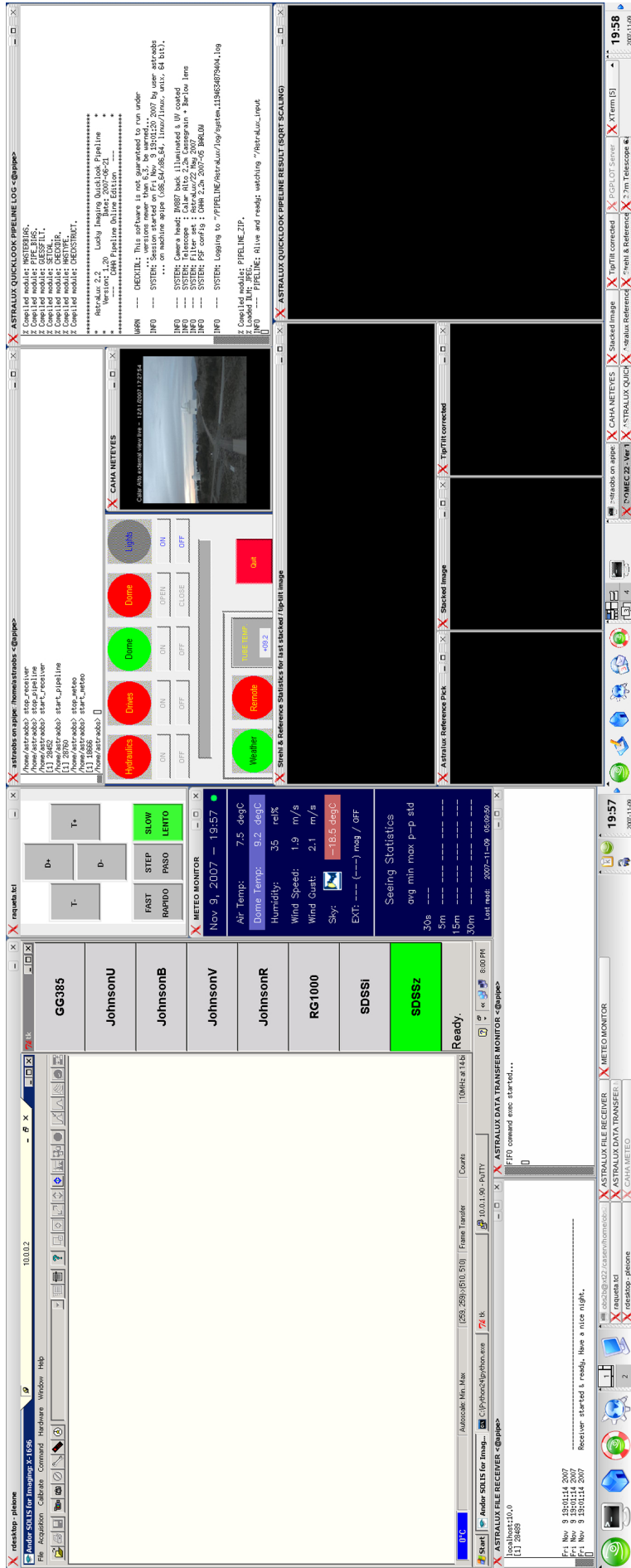


Figure 8. AstraLux screen layout on xt22 in the SOR

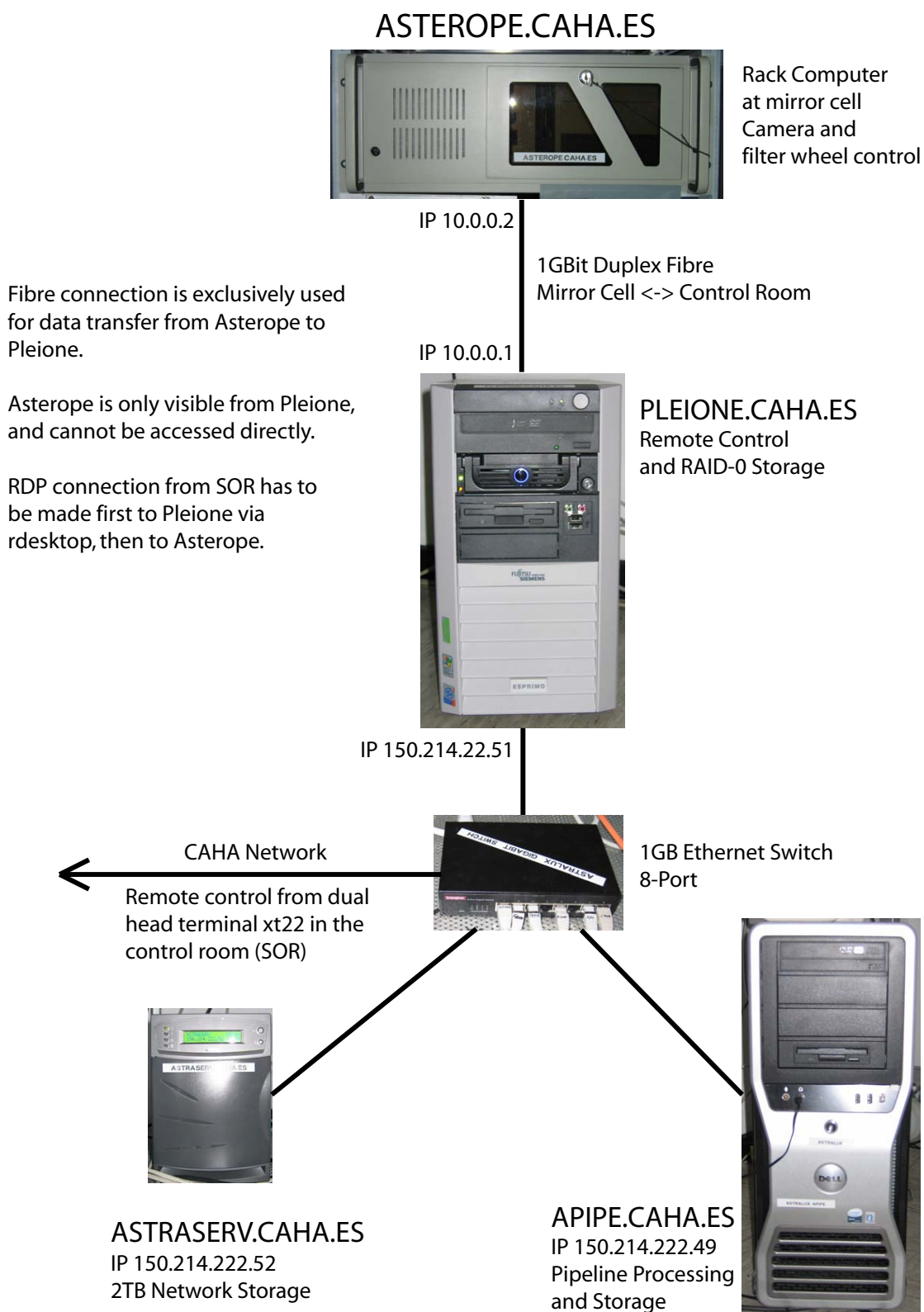


Figure 9. Layout of the current AstraLux network with exclusive fibre connection.