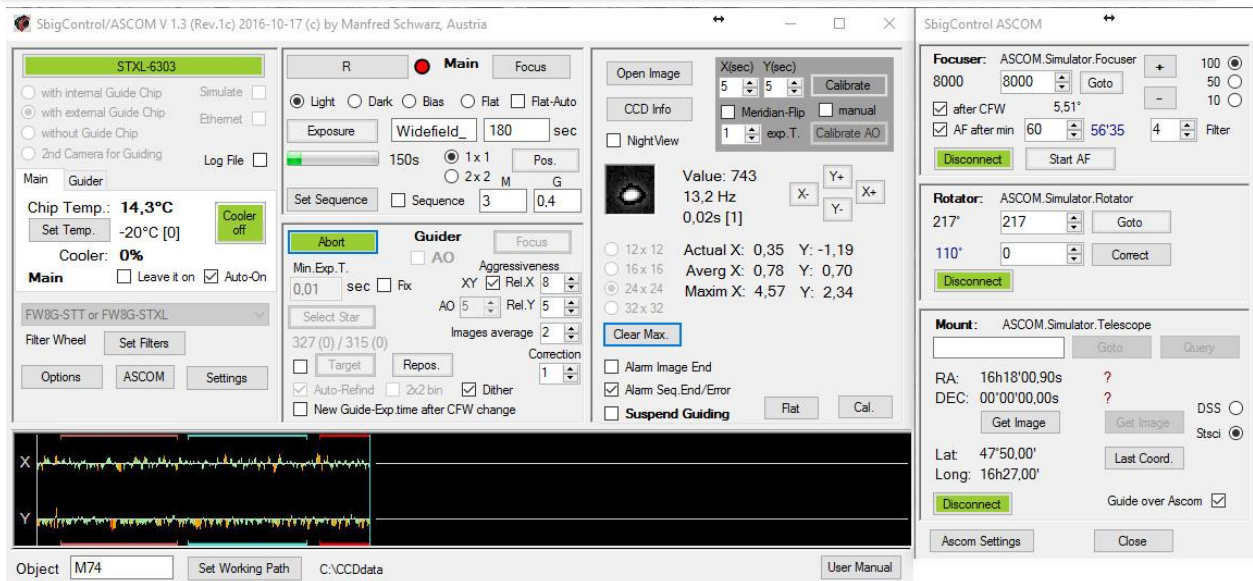


SbigControl – User Manual



Version of Software: 1.3

Version date of manual: November 6th 2016

Homepage: <http://www.astrophoto.at>

Email: ms@astrophoto.at, Manfred Schwarz

User Group: <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/SbigControl/info>



Features

- **Supports Adaptive Optics AO** and also AO-X (some other programs do not support it)
- **Supports internal-/ external-guider chip and separate guider camera**
- **Sequence** – you can define your full imaging program of an object for a night and let it work automatically
- **Refind guide star** – if a guide star is lost SbigControl can find it again automatically
- **Dithering**
- **Automatic save of images** in an automatically created folder structure
- **Automatic change of guiding exposure time** during guiding if star brightness changes
- **Automatically find of optimal Flatfield exposure time**
- **Open shutter during guiding without imaging** (most software turns the shutter off permanently)
- **Selectable acoustic alarm** for end of image, end of sequence, or error condition
- **Log file** for imaging, with time stamps and much more data
- **Many user changeable parameters** to customize the software for your needs
- **ASCOM support for focuser** – auto-focus, **rotator** and **telescope mount**
- **Image download from professional source**, STSCI and DSS
- **Easy to use** – SbigControl is developed by a user (me) who has worked over the last 13 years, with Sbig cameras

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Copyright

You can use copies of this purchased software on different computer for your personal use. Please do not copy it for other persons. I have spent much time creating this software and worked full-time to develop and make it better for you. The price of the program is fair, please also be fair. ☺

Credits

Many thanks to John Galle for correction of my bad English in this manual!

Many thanks to all helpful users, who were tested the preliminary releases!

Many thanks to SBIG with their great support!

Many thanks to all users who sent and send me comments, ideas and hints about bugs!

General description and system requirements

SbigControl is an application to control SBIG cameras with USB or Ethernet interface from Santa Barbara Instrument Group, since 2014 a company of Diffraction Limited.

You can control camera systems with main chip only or main chip with internal or external remote guide chip or extra guide cameras like STi.

This application was tested with several Sbig cameras and accessories, but not with every model and combination! If you have trouble with your combination, please report it in the Yahoo user group or by email.

Please note that there is no guarantee that using SbigControl will not affect other software or the hardware.

I, Manfred Schwarz, developer, am not liable for such issues, problems or any damages!

System requirements:

- Win 7 or higher (Tested with Win 10 64bit, Win 8 64bit, Win 7 32 and 64bit)
- 2GB memory (more is better)
- Screen resolution 1024 x 768 (more is better)
- Microsoft Visual C++ Redistributable 2013 (X86)
- For Win 7: Microsoft .NET framework 4.5.x installed (e.g. 4.5.1)
- Sbig camera with USB connection or Ethernet connection
- Latest SBIGDriverChecker64 (<http://www.sbig.com>) and Sbig drivers (tested with sbigudrv.dll 4.94 Build 1 from 2016-04-08)
- Guiding with telescope port of Sbig camera or ASCOM telescope driver
- ASCOM 6.1 or newer (<http://ascom-standards.org/>)

Installation

Download the Setup-file from given link (if you haven't one, send an email to ms@astrophoto.at).

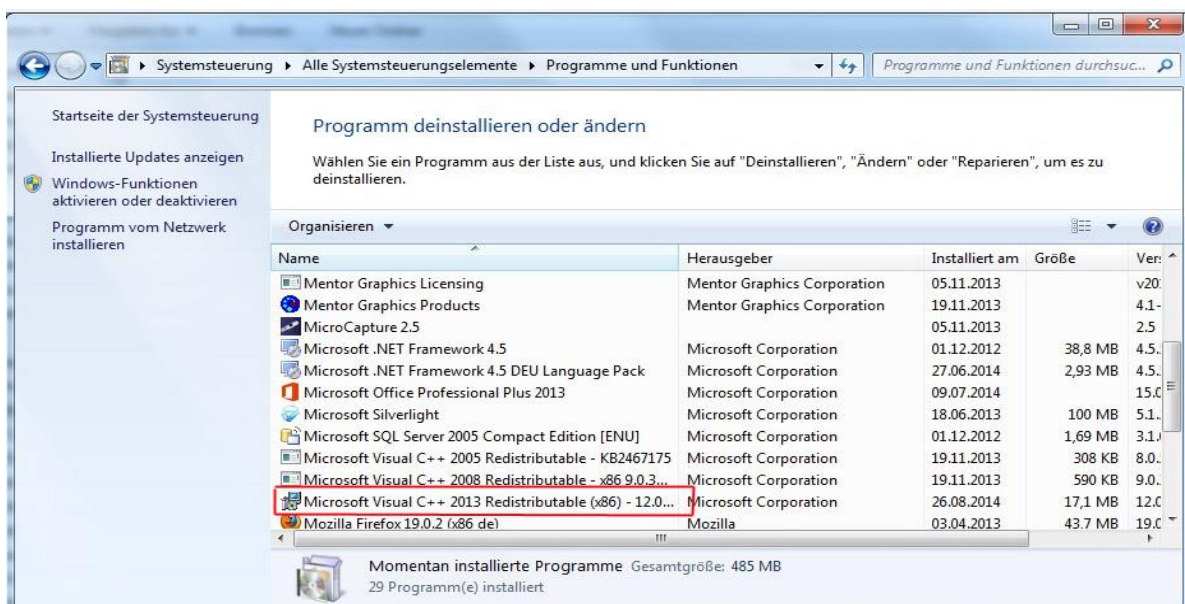
Please rename the downloaded file from setup_SC13Rx.e to setup_SC13Rx.exe. (x is for the release number, e.g. setup_SC13R1a.exe). The file is renamed because of some browser do not download .exe files.

Start setup_SC13Rx.exe

Follow the installation by pressing "Next", ... until it is finished.

Check, if necessary, that the Microsoft components are installed:

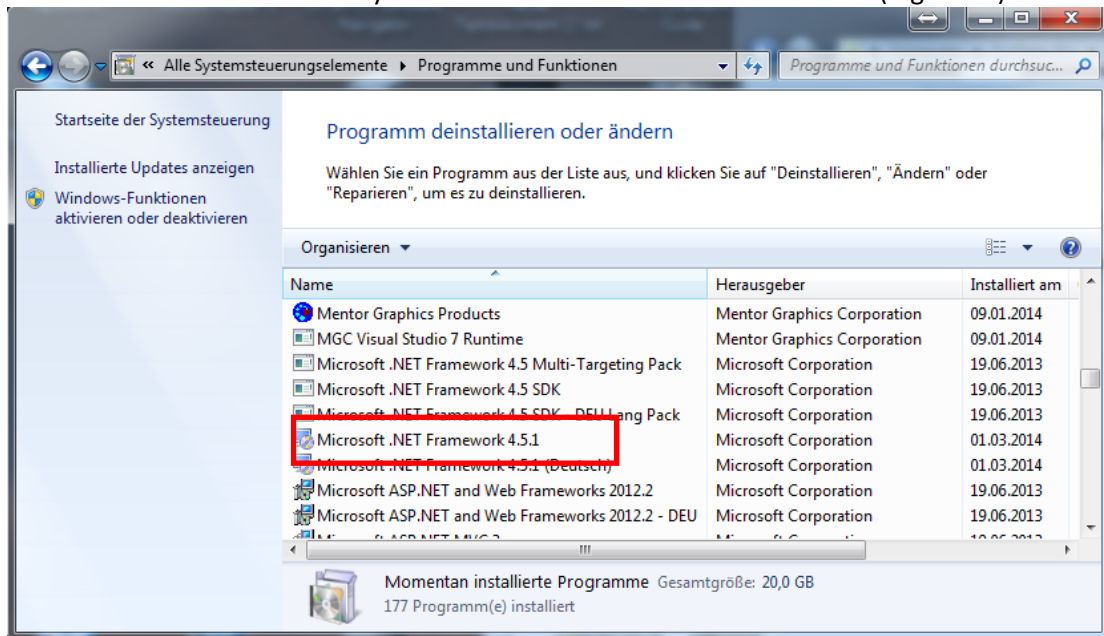
- Open "Control Panel"
- Open "Programs and Features"
- Look if there is an entry with: "Microsoft Visual C++ 2013 x86 Redistributable"



If : "Microsoft Visual C++ 2013 x86 Redistributable" isn't installed, then download "vcredist_x86.exe" from: http://www.astrophoto.at/SbigControl/vcredist_x86.exe and install it.

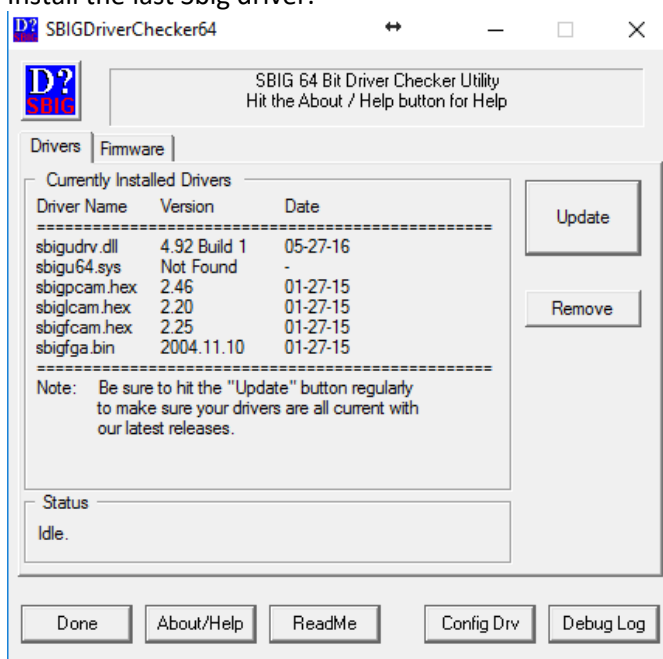
If you use Win 7, check if .NET 4.5.x is installed (Win 8 includes .Net 4.5):

- Open "Control Panel"
- Open "Programs and Features"
- Look if there is an entry with: "Microsoft .NET Framework 4.5.x" (e.g. 4.5.1)



If .NET Framework 4.5 isn't installed, then download "dotNetFx45_Full_setup.exe" from http://www.astrophoto.at/SbigControl/dotNetFx45_Full_setup.exe and install it. During installation of .NET, you will need an internet connection.

Install the last "SBIgDriverChecker64" from <http://www.sbig.com/support/software/>
Install the last Sbig driver.



If you don't have installed ASCOM 6.1 or newer version, please install it from:

<http://ascom-standards.org/>

Note, there is no entry in the registry! If you want to uninstall the software, you have only to remove SbigControl via control panel – programs and features.

You can be sure that no remnants remains!

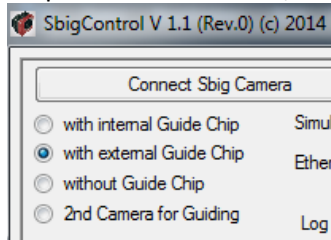
Difference between Demo-Version and Full-Version

There is only one thing different in the Demo-Version: The files will not be stored automatically. Instead of this, a Demo-FIT-file is stored into the working area to show you the auto-save-structure. Therefore, it is possible to verify all functions and see the result on screen.

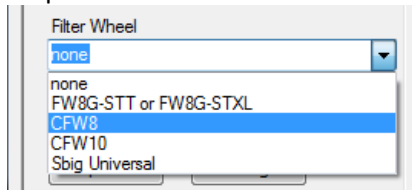
Quick Start

If you want to start very quickly, read this chapter, but you really should read the full detailed description following this chapter!

Step 1: Choose internal, external or no guide chip or extra camera for guiding

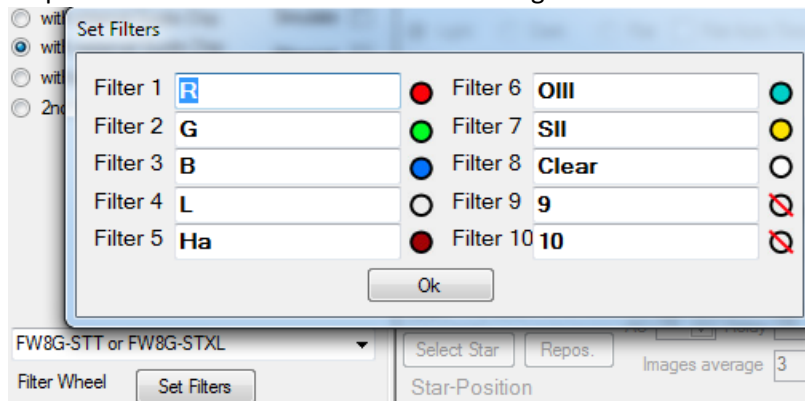


Step 2: choose the correct filter wheel



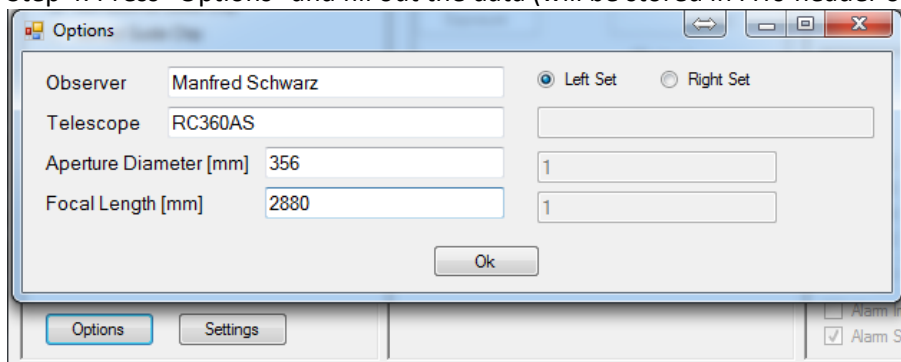
If your filter wheel isn't in the list, choose "Sbig Universal"

Step 3: Press "Set Filters" and check or change filter names



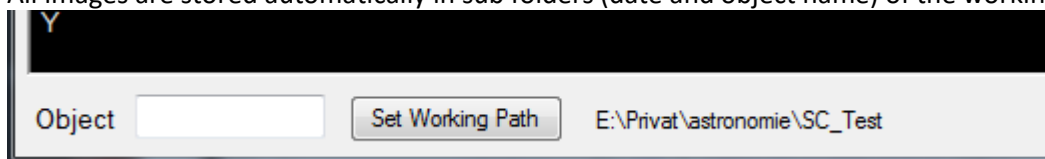
Press on the colored filter symbol to change it to the desired color.

Step 4: Press "Options" and fill out the data (will be stored in FITs-header of images)

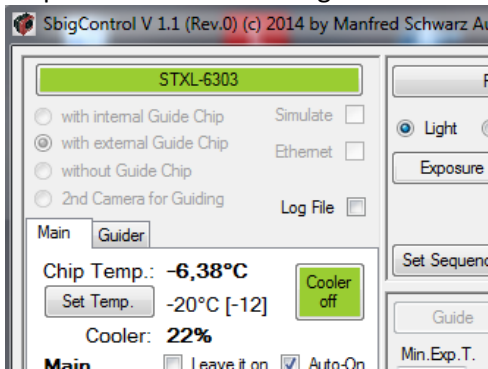


Step 5: Choose Working Path by pressing "Set Working Path"

All images are stored automatically in sub folders (date and object name) of the working path.

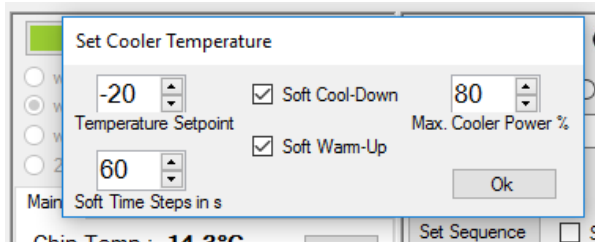


Step 6: Press "Connect Sbig Camera"



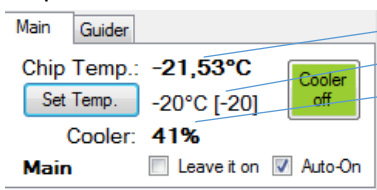
Your camera model is shown in the "Connect" button.

Step 7: Press "Set Temp" to set the cooler temperature



If you check "Soft Cooldown" you can set your desired target temperature and SbigControl will cool down in soft steps to avoid freezing of the chip.

Step 8: Press "Cooler On" to start the cooler



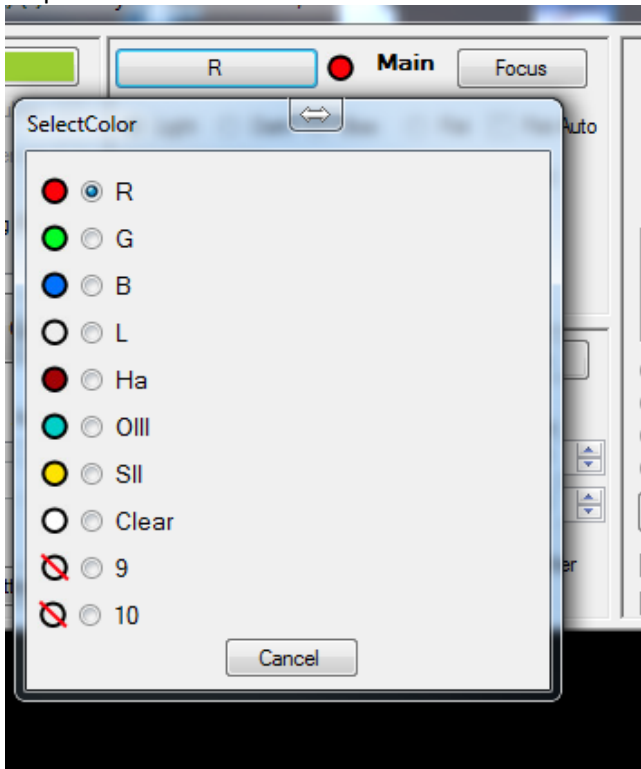
Actual chip temperature

Set-Point [internal set-point of soft cooldown]

% Power level of cooler

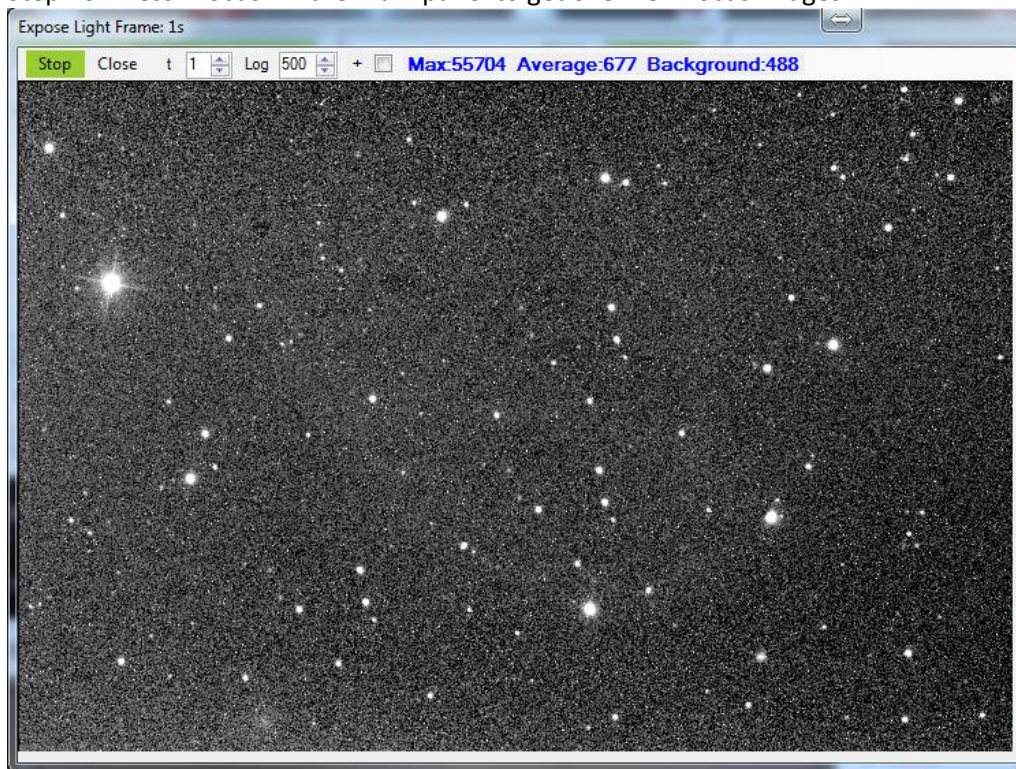
If you have a separate cooled camera for guiding, click on "Guider" tab.

Step 9: Press color button to choose a filter



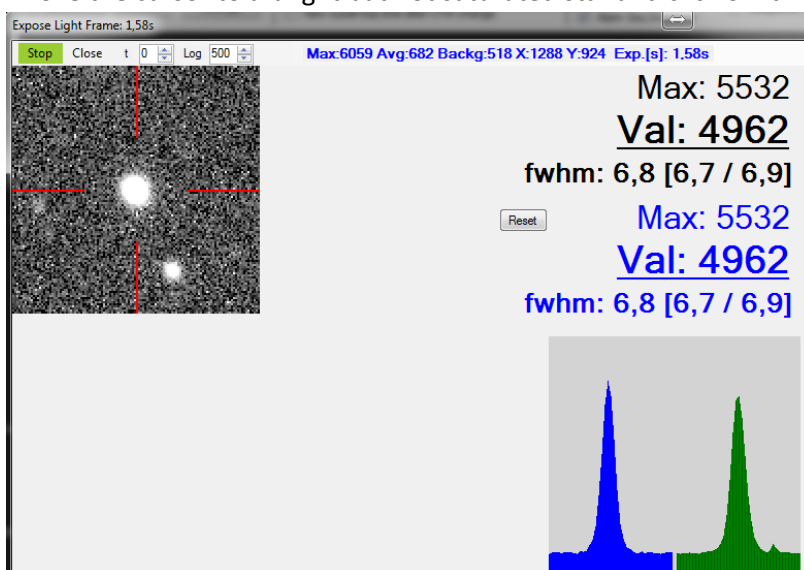
Select required filter (e.g. "L").

Step 10: Press "Focus" in the main panel to get overview focus images



Focus broadly and press "Stop".

Move the cursor to a bright but not saturated star and click on it.



Maximum ADU value in the field
Value of the center area of the star
FWHM of the star in pixel

Storage of the best values in this session

Blue: star profile horizontal
Green: star profile vertical

Press "Stop" if you are perfectly focused.

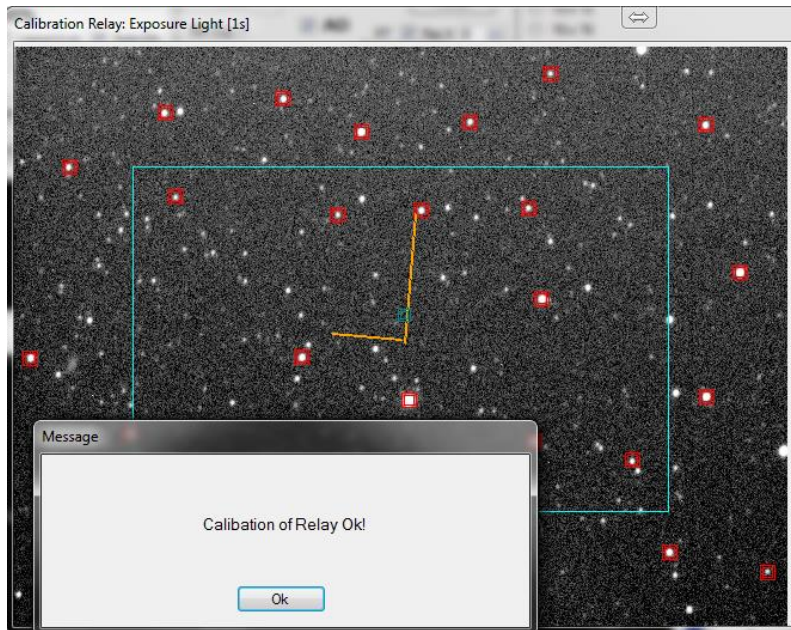
On cameras with internal guide chip normally it should be focused now. However, you can do this focus function also with the button "Focus" in the Guide panel.

Step 11: Find a guide star

Use "Focus" in the Guide panel to position a guide star approximate in the middle of the guide chip.

Alternative use "Pos." in the Main panel to get running images from main chip and guider, to position the object and a guide star at the same time.

Step 12: Calibrate relays by pressing "Calibrate" button



In this example, “Settings” – “Pattern” – “Use it for calibration” is selected.

Calibration works with pattern match.

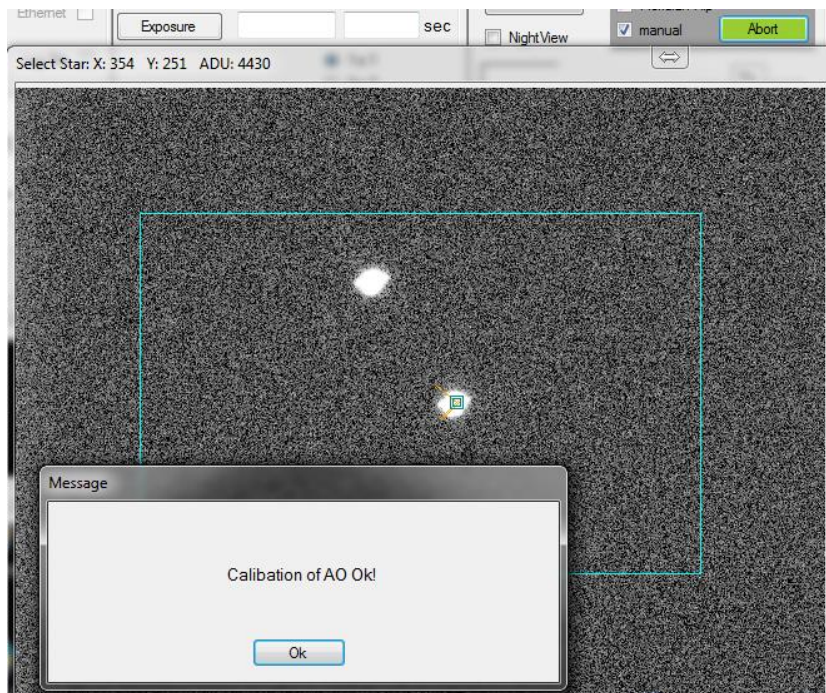
If there are problems to find the pattern, select “manual” for manual calibration.

For further information, look at the detailed description.

If you use small focal length telescope you should uncheck “Remove Hotpixel” in the “Setting” window (look at chapter

Settings).

Step 12a: If you use AO, calibrate it by pressing “Calibrate AO” (only first time necessary)



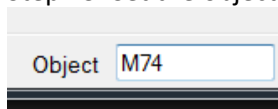
In this example, “manual” mode is selected.

You have to click on the star after each move.

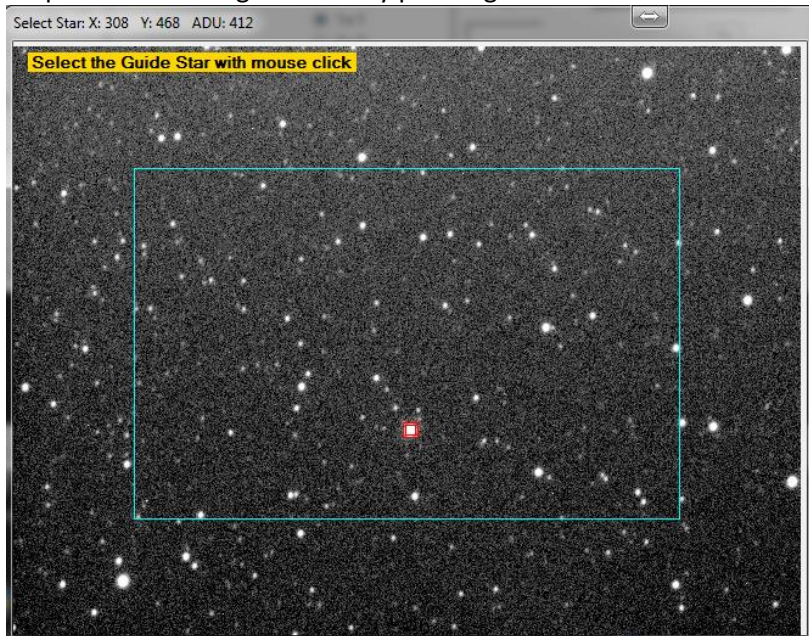
You have to check the box “AO” if you want to use AO optics.

If more than one stars is recognized in the automatic mode, you get a message and you have to select the preferred star at each calibration image with a mouse click. If you have selected “Pattern: Use it for Calibration” in the “Settings” window, SbigControl works with a star pattern match algorithm and should work automatically with more than one star.

Step 13: Set the object name



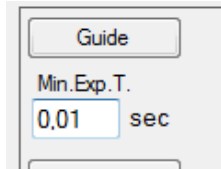
Step 14: Select the guide Star by pressing “Select Star”



The optimal guide star is marked by SbigControl, but you can choose each star by clicking on a star.

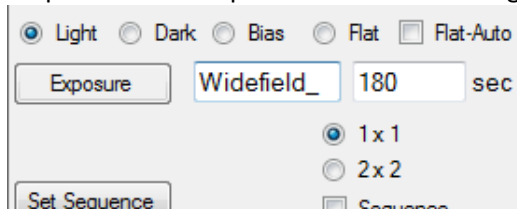
If only one star is displayed, SbigControl choose it automatically.

Step 15: Change the minimum guide exposure time if you want and start guiding with “Guide” button



This makes sense to avoid too fast corrections of the mount in case of bright guide star. Also on bad seeing, it could be better to have a longer exposure time of the guide star.

Step 16: Set the exposure time and binning



In this example, a file name prefix is defined “Widefield_”.

Step 17: Start exposure by pressing “Exposure”

After finishing an exposure, your image is automatically stored in a sub-folder under the working directory.

The folder name is a compound of date and object name, e.g. 2015-09-16_M74

If you have set the parameter “Separate folder for date”, you get a folder with the date and a subfolder with the object.

The file name is a compound of prefix, object name, filter, binning, exposure time, temperature and running number, e.g. M74_L_1x1_180s_m20C_001.fit or with prefix of upper example:

Widefield_M74_L_1x1_180s_m20C_001.fit

Detailed description of functions

Title line of the main window



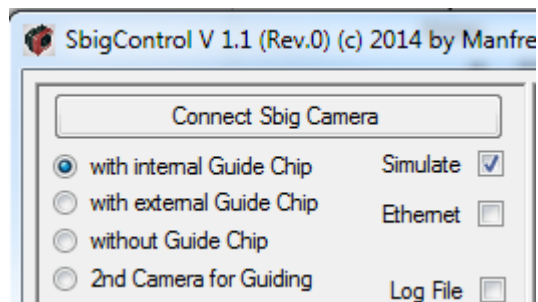
Next to the program name SbigControl/ASCOM you find the software version number e.g. V 1.3 and the revision number (Rev.1c).

Configuration first time only

If you always work with the same camera setup, you need to set the following parameters only at the first time:

- Kind of guide chip
- Filter wheel
- Filter names
- Options
- Working Path

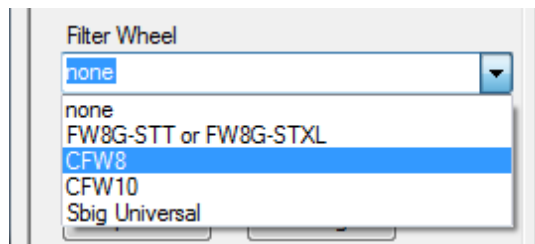
Kind of guide chip and camera interface



- "with internal Guide Chip": your camera has an internal guide chip (e.g. ST-10)
- "with external Guide Chip": external remote chip or a chip in a self-guiding filter wheel
- "without Guide Chip": only imaging, camera without guide chip
- "2nd Camera for Guiding": separate camera for guiding (e.g. STi)

If your camera(s) works with Ethernet connection, check "Ethernet". After connecting, the IP address of the main camera is displayed under "Ethernet" checkbox.

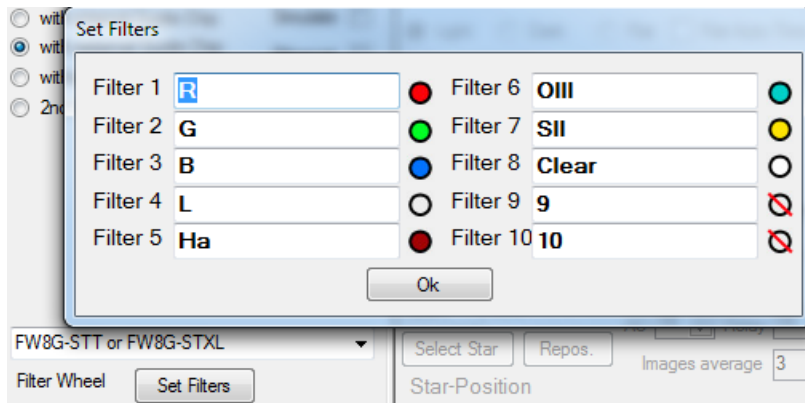
Filter Wheel



Choose your filter wheel from the list.
If you don't have a filter wheel, select "none".
If you don't find your filter wheel in the list, select "Sbig Universal"

If you don't have a listed filter wheel and are having troubles with selection "Sbig Universal", please report it. I will add your filter wheel in the next revision.

Filter Names



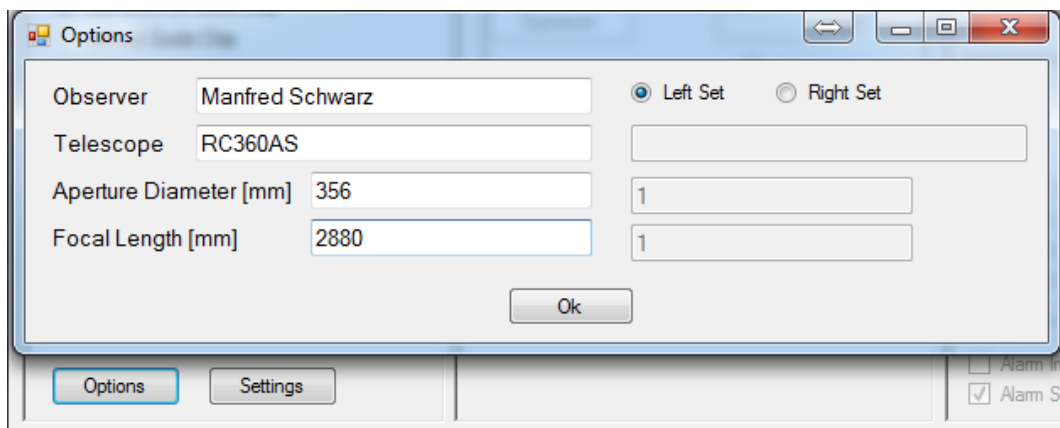
After pressing “Set Filters” a new window pops up. There are up to 10 filter positions.

Here you can define your filter setup.

The filter names are also stored in the FITs header of your images and in the file names.

Click on the color symbols beside the filter names to change the color of the symbol.

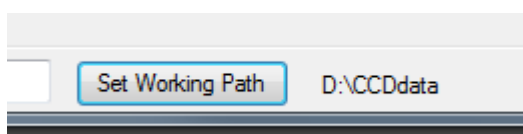
Options



These parameters are stored in the FITs-header of each image.

You have the possibility to define 2 different telescope settings and switch easily by selecting “Left Set” or “Right Set”. If you change the set, also all parameters of “Settings” are changed to this setup.

Working path and folder/file structure



The working path is the base folder for auto-save.

Each exposed image from the main chip is stored automatically in a sub-folder of working path. The sub-folder name is a combination of date and object name (see below).

The date range is not the same as the normal clock-range, that means:

- Images taken from 8am to 12am have the actual date
- Images taken from 12am to 8am have the date of the prior day

There is a practical reason for this. You will imaging over midnight and want all images from one object in the same folder.

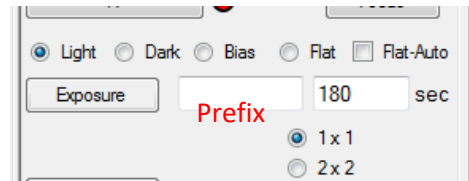
Example: Working path D:\CCDdata, Object M51, date 21th April 2014, time 1:30am

Sub-Folder: D:\CCDdata\2014-04-20_M51\

If you have set the “Settings” parameter “Separate folder date”, you get a folder with the date and a subfolder with the object.

The image name is a combination of several parameters:

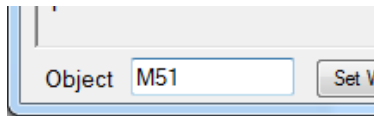
- Prefix
- Object name or “Bias” or “Dark” or “Flat”
- Filter name (not for bias or dark frames)
- Binning “1x1” or “2x2”
- Exposure time (“180s” for 3 minutes or “0s45” for 0.45 seconds)
- Chip temperature in °C (“15C” for +15°C or “m20C” for -20°C)
- Running number to avoid an overwrite of images



Example:

M51_L_1x1_180s_m30C_001.fit

Object name

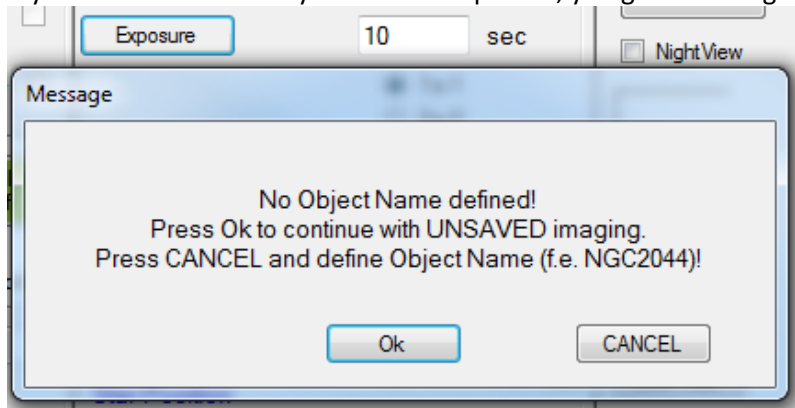


Enter the name of the object.

This is stored in the FITs-header and is a part of the auto-save folder and filename. Also it is necessary for the saved guiding information, to allow it to reposition the guide star on the same place as it was on your last session.

You can only use characters which are allowed in file names!

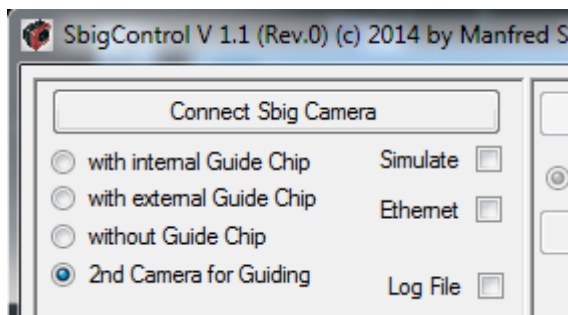
If you leave it blank and you start an exposure, you get following warning:



If you want to take only an unsaved test image, press “Ok”. Otherwise, press “Cancel” and fill out the “Object” field.

Connect your SBIG camera

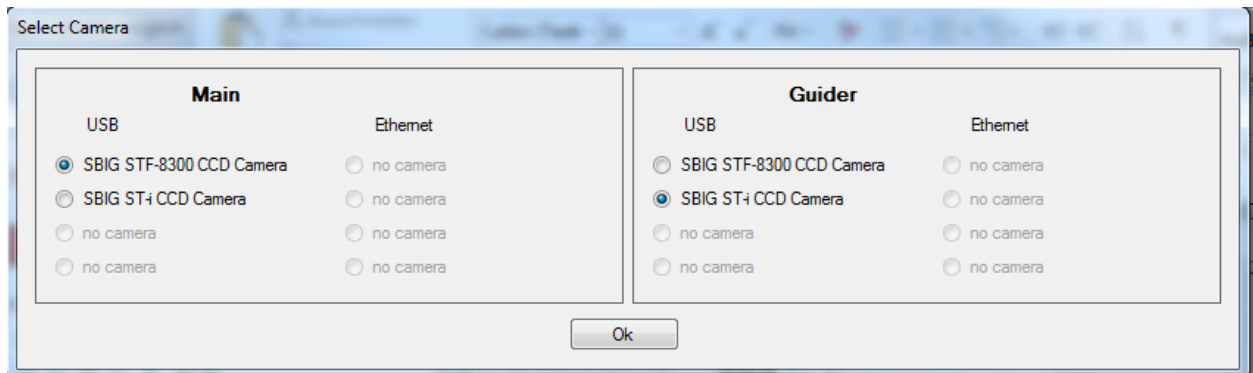
SbigControl supports Sbig cameras with USB or Ethernet ports. After connecting the camera with a USB or Ethernet cable to your PC and powering on the camera, you can press “Connect Sbig Camera”.



Don't forget to check “Ethernet” if you want to work with Ethernet. Ethernet is slower than USB for downloading images from the camera!

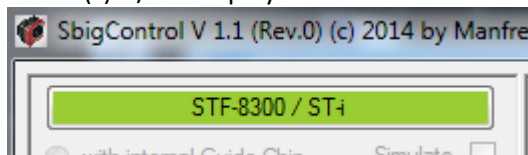
If you are working with Ethernet connection, your firewall will display a warning that SbigControl.exe want to access your network. Allow it!
The recognized IP address of the main camera is shown under the Ethernet checkbox after connecting.

If you have checked “2nd Camera for Guiding”, you have to select main and guider camera.



SbigControl remembers this combination at the next start.

After initializing the camera, the connect button turns to a green color and the name(s) of the camera model(s) is/are displayed on the button.

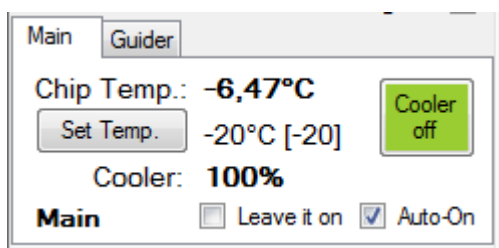


Disconnect the SBIG camera

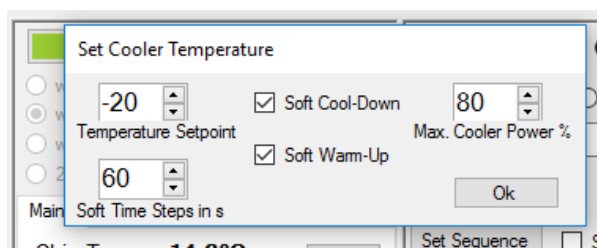
Press the green button with the camera name to disconnect the camera from SbigControl. You should do it before you disconnect the USB or Ethernet cable or power off the camera. The cooler is switched off automatically, if “Leave it on” is unchecked (look below).

If you close SbigControl with the red “X”, the application forces a disconnect before closing the windows.

Cooler



With “Set Temp.” you can change the chip temperature set-point.



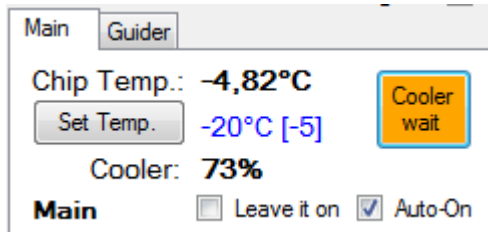
Enter the desired temperature.

If you check “Soft Cool-Down”, SbigControl cools down in a soft way, especially in the area of 0°C. This should avoid freezing of the chip.

In this case, you can set the desired temperature without making small manual steps.

If you check “Soft Warm-Up”, SbigControl does not switch off the cooler immediately. The cooler steps up in a soft way, especially in the area of 0°C. This should avoid condensation water on the chip.

The “Soft Time Steps in s” is the time in seconds to wait until the next temperature step is done in case of soft cool-down or soft warm-up.



After pressing “Cooler off” the button turns to orange.

After reach more than +5°C, the cooler turns off automatically.

“Max.Cooler Power %” is to limit the maximum cooler power to avoid disturbances in the image from the cooler.

If it is not possible to reach the set point temperature with the entered maximum power, SbigControl adjusts the internal set point automatically increasing by 5°C after 5 minutes. That makes it easier to handle dark-libraries.

Example: your set point -30°C is not reached with entered maximum power: the adjusted internal set point = -25°C. In this case, the displayed set point turns to a blue color.

If the power of the cooler falls, SbigControl try to set the desired temperature again.

“Auto-On”: Really, I’m one of the persons who often forget to start the cooler and consequently I loose the first images because the chip is at ambient temperature. Check this field to switch on the cooler automatically after connecting the camera.

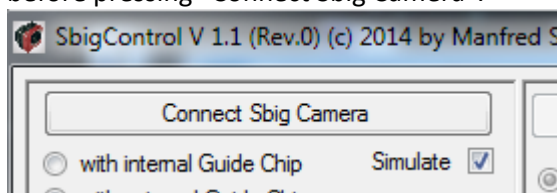
If you have not checked the “Auto-On” option, press: “Cooler On” to start the cooler.

“Leave it on”: If you want to disconnect the camera and re-connect it again later in the session, and you want the cooler to remain active in between, check this box.

If it is unchecked, the cooler will switch off automatically if you disconnect the camera by pressing “Camera” button or if you close SbigControl with the red “X”.

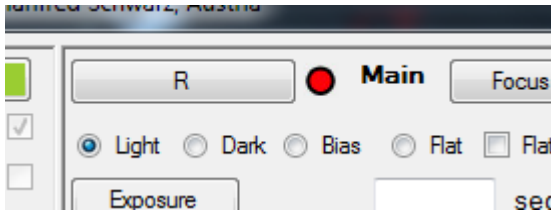
Simulation

If you haven’t connected a camera to your PC and you want to play with the software, check “Simulate” before pressing “Connect Sbig Camera”.



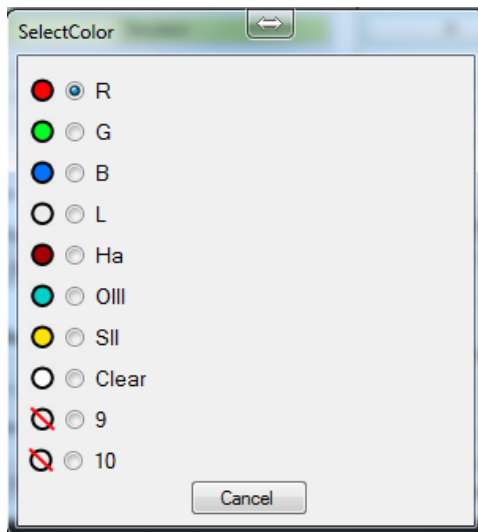
Most functions work in the simulation mode. Try it and have fun!

Choose color filter



In the main camera panel is a button (top left hand side) with the actual filter name. On the right side of the button is a symbol for the filter color. You can define it with “Set Filters”.

Press the button to choose another filter.



Select the required filter and the window close automatically and the filter wheel moves to the selected position.

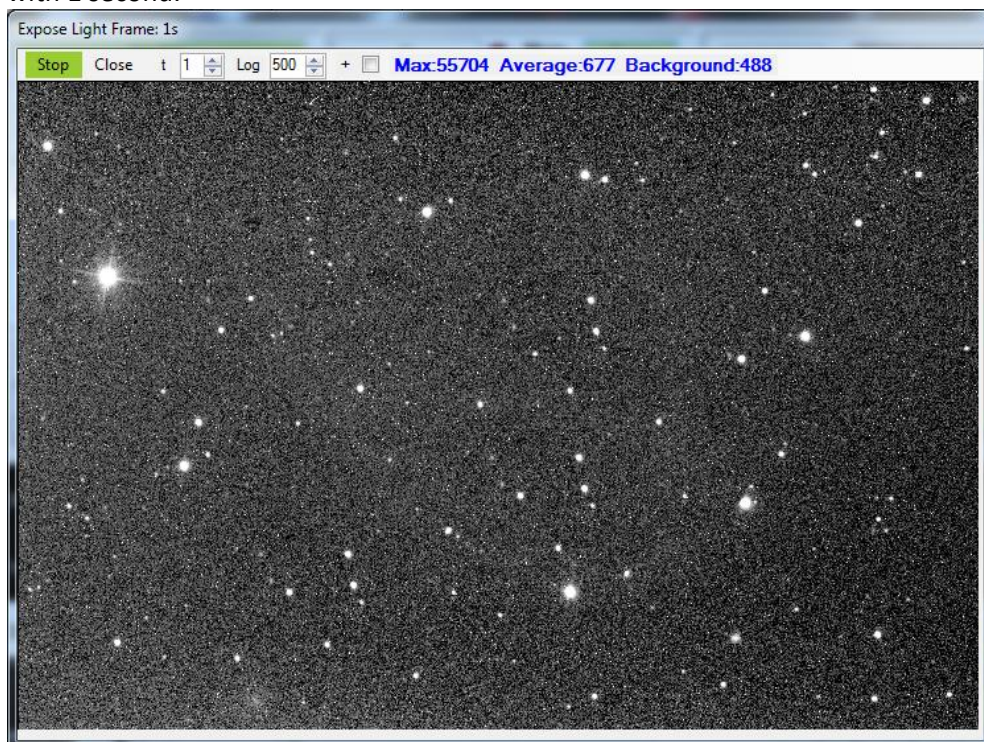
As the filter wheel is working, the button shows “... moving ...”

If you don't want to change the filter, press “Cancel”.

Focus main chip

Press “Focus” in the main camera panel.

A new window pops up showing a continuously updating exposure of the main chip starts (dark frame corrected). Normally it is in 3x3 binning, but you can change it with “Settings”. The exposure time starts with 1 second.



You can see 3 blue parameters:

- Max: maximum ADU (brightness) value found in this image (a full charged pixel can have normally 65535 but can be lower, it depends on the camera hardware)
- Average: average ADU of all pixels
- Background: background value of the image (left shoulder of histogram)

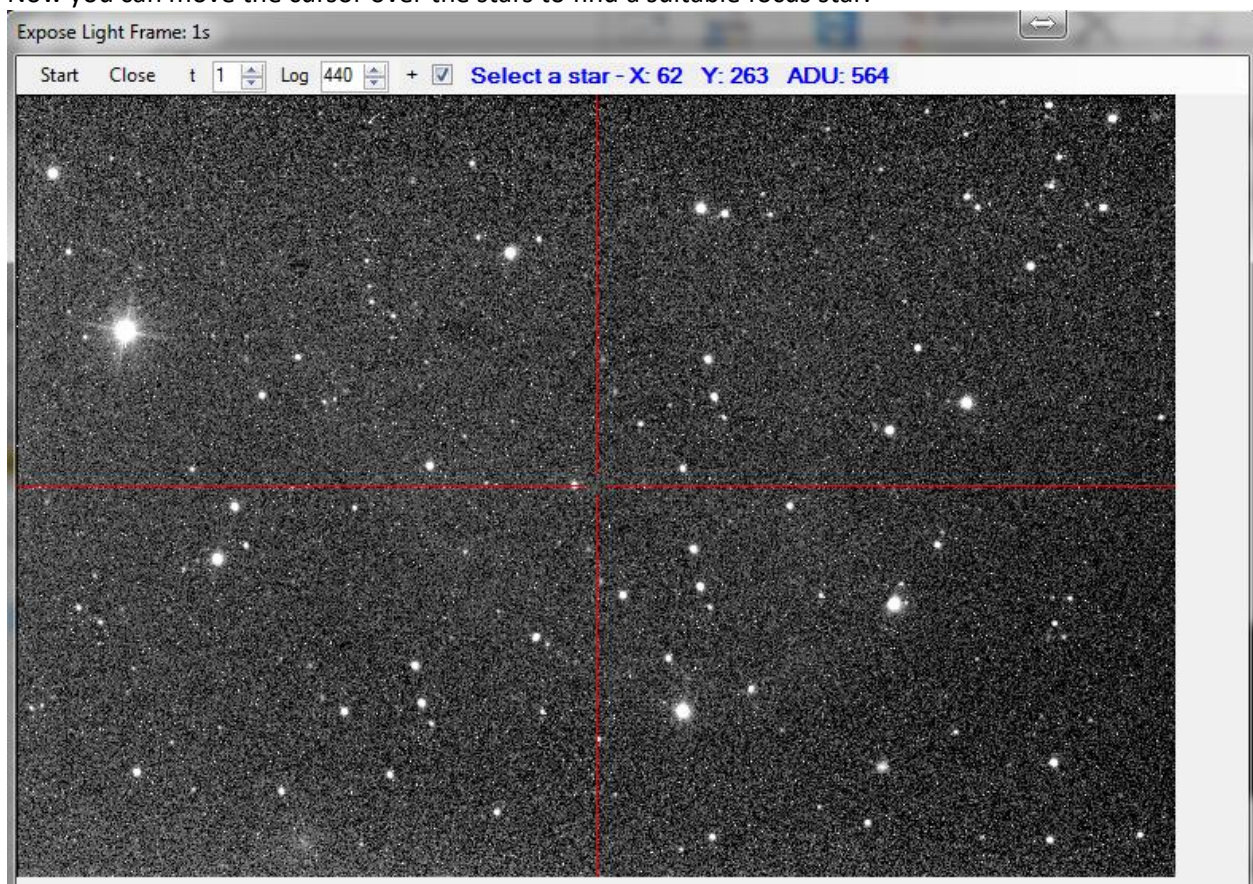
You can switch on a cross-hairs with the “+” checkbox (see below). The change of cross-hairs is shown after next focus exposure.

If you want to change the exposure time, change the value “t”. This represent the exposure time in seconds. The value “0” sets the exposure time to 0.5s

You can change the brightness of displayed images by changing the value “Log”. Lower values generate darker images. You can change it with the arrows (+/- 50) or enter it direct in the field. The change is shown after next focus exposure.

Change the focus of your optics to get optical small stars and press “Stop”, to stop the continuous imaging. Please do not be impatient if the “Stop” button does not turn immediately to “Start”. The current exposure has to be finished before the button changes.

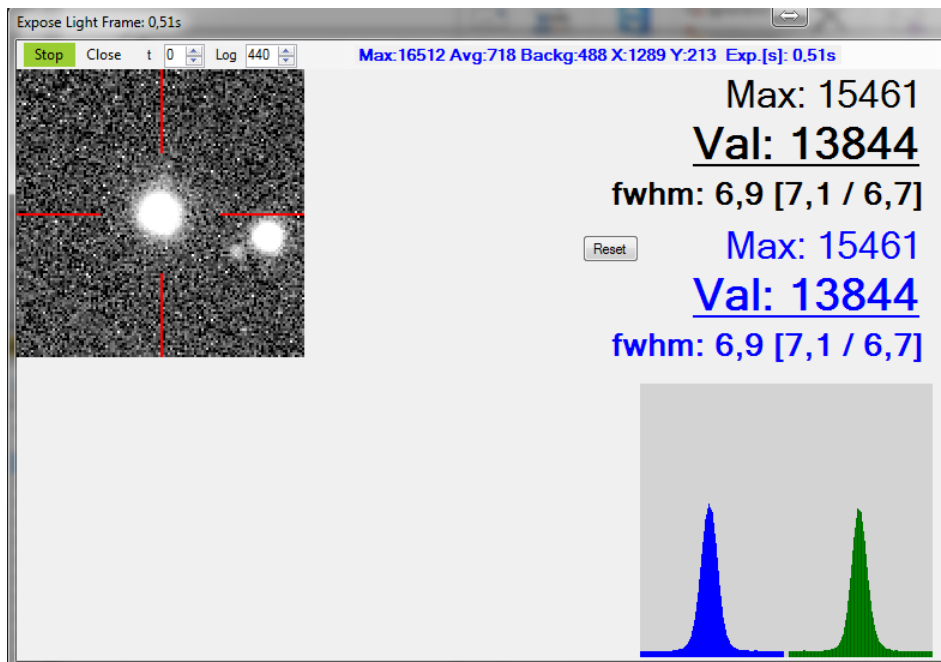
Now you can move the cursor over the stars to find a suitable focus star.



You can see the blue parameters with x and y coordinates and ADU value of the center pixels of the star where the cursor is located.

Take care that you select a star with ADU smaller than 50000 but not too small to get lower exposure time for precise focusing.

Click on the desired star.



Now you get a 120 x 120 pixel sub-window of the chip (size is changeable with “Settings”) and a continuous imaging in 1x1 binning. The display is zoomed to 2:1. The exposure time is automatically calculated and shown on the top line in blue (EXP.[s]: ...).

If the star moves because of non-optimal aligned telescope mount, the detailed window moves to hold the star in the middle position (“Settings” – “Focus” – “follow star” has to be selected). In the header line are the center coordinates of sub-window displayed with X and Y.

On the top line, you find also the actual Max, Average and Background values of the whole sub window. Additional the center position of the detailed window against the full-chip and the actual exposure time.

The graphic shows a profile in horizontal (blue) and vertical (green).

On the right side, you find in black letters the actual parameters for the brightest star in displayed (marked with red lines) window:

- Max: maximum pixel value (ADU) of the star
- Value: the average value (ADU) of the star center area (3x3 pixel)
- fwhm: Full width at half maximum value of the star (also separated in X and Y)

On the right side, you find in blue letters the best values. Therefore, you can see if you are over the focus. Max and Value are better if higher, fwhm is better if lower.

With “Reset” button, the blue best-values are set to actual values.

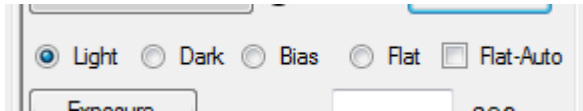
On the top, you have 2 numeric boxes.

The left one “t” is to change the exposure time in seconds if you are not lucky with the automatic calculated time.

The right one “Log” is to change the display contrast (higher values to see more background details). You can click on the small ▲ and ▼ icons in the boxes to change the value or you can edit it directly in the box.

If you are in perfect focus, press “Stop” or “Close” to close the window.

Light, Dark, Bias and Flat



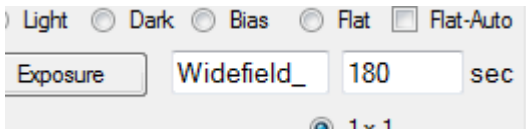
Light and Flat are normal exposures with open shutter. Dark and Bias works with closed shutter.

The auto-save file name is different depending on this setting (look at “Working path and folder/file structure”).

If you take flat images and you have checked “Flat-Auto”, SbigControl find out automatically the best exposure time to get the histogram at appr. 45000 ADU (changeable with “Settings”).

Selecting “Bias” turns the exposure time automatically to the lowest possible!

Exposure Time

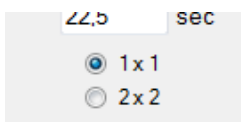


Enter the desired exposure time in seconds.

Attention: if you use a decimal comma, use the right one which is common in your country specific windows version “.” or “,” (changeable in Windows – Control Panel).

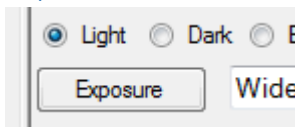
If you use the wrong one, you get a wrong big value.

Binning



Choose 1x1 or 2x2 binning

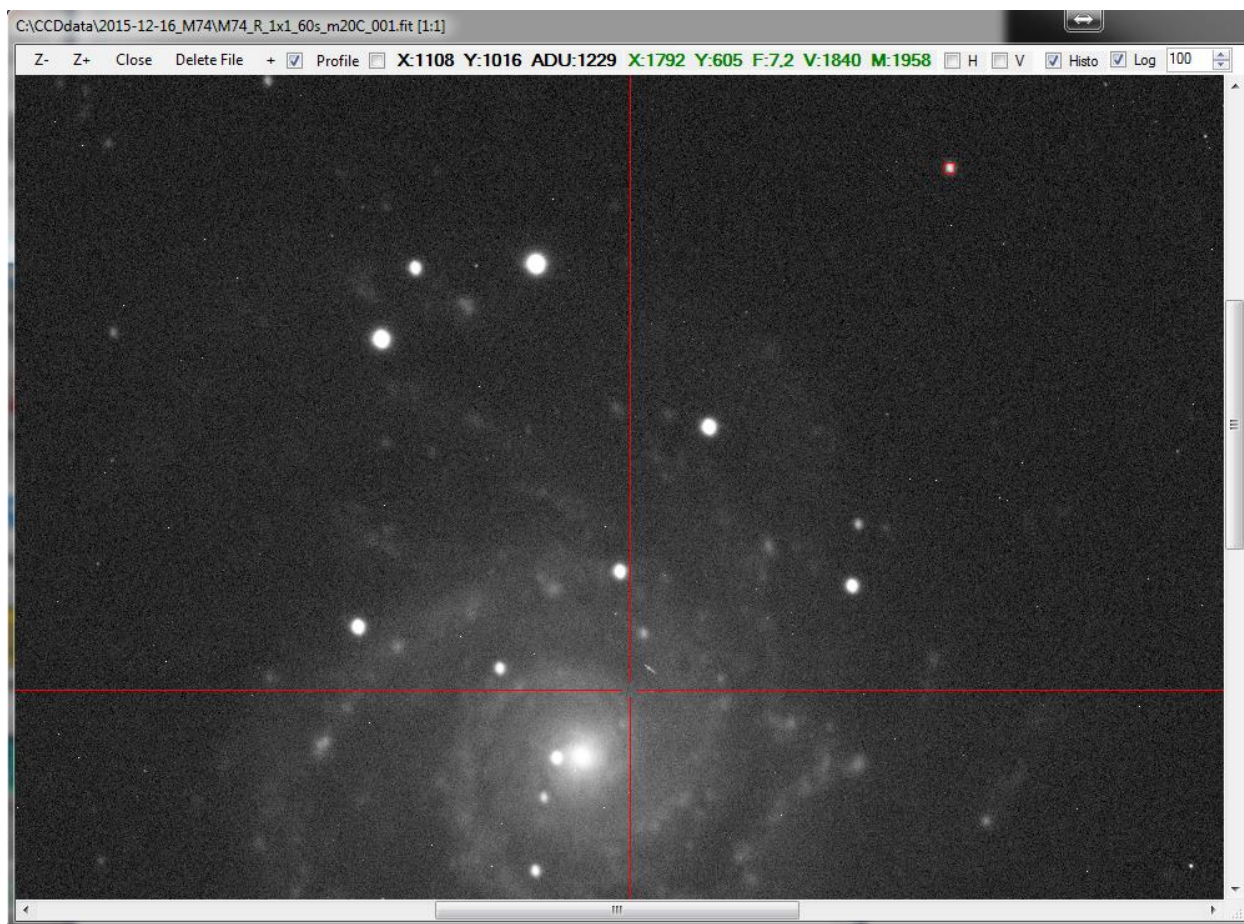
Exposure



After setting all exposure parameters and normally after commencing guiding (see later chapters), you can press “Exposure” to take a single image. After finishing, the image is stored automatically (look at “Working path and folder/file structure”).

If you abort the exposure by pressing “Abort” button, the image is not stored!

After finishing the exposure, the image is displayed in a new window.



You can zoom in and out with “Z-” and “Z+”.

The button “close”, hide this window.

The button “Delete File”, deletes the stored file. You can use it to delete a disturbed exposure.

Check the box “Histo” to display a histogram with ADU range 0 to 65535.

Check the box “Log” to stretch the display (not the image data) in a logarithmic function.

The histo-display is NOT changed with logarithmic display (changed at SbigControl V 1.1).

Check the box “+” to get a cross-hair

Check the box “Profile” to open the profile window (look at next chapter).

Check the box “H” to mirror the image horizontal (only the display, not the data).

Check the box “V” to mirror the image vertical (only the display, not the data).

A change of the numeric value changes the stretch parameter of the display if “Log” is checked. A higher value makes it brighter.

If you move the cursor over the image, you can see on the top line in black letters: X and Y position and the pixel ADU value.

If you click on a star, you get a red rectangle on the display (not in the data) and on the top line in green letters: X and Y position, F: FWHM of star in pixel, V: average value of the star center area, M: maximum ADU in the star center.

Profile

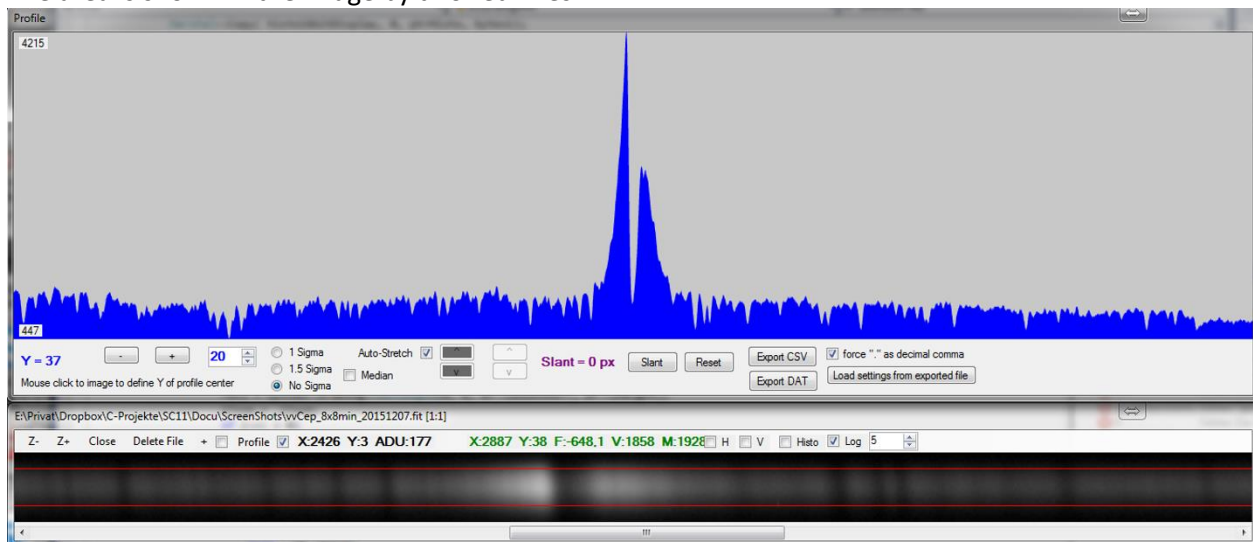
Check the “profile” box opens a new window with a profile graphic. Especially for spectrographic images it is a very helpful tool.

Click on the image to define the Y position for the horizontal profile. The position is marked with a red line in the image.

You can change the Y position pixel wise by using the “+” and “-” buttons.

If you want to get a profile of an average Y area, change the number (in example 20) in the numeric box by pressing the small arrows or enter a number directly. This is a +/- value, that means, if you enter 20, you get an average brightness value of 41 Y positions from Y – 20 to Y + 20.

The area is shown in the image by two red lines.



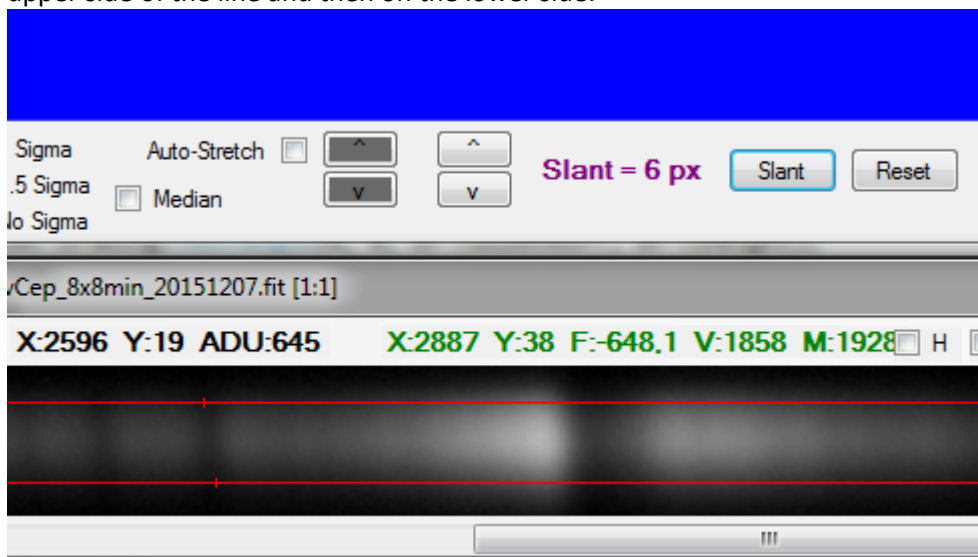
You can use a sigma function, if you select it. 1 sigma is stronger than 1,5 sigma.

The median has only an effect if you have selected a sigma function.

Normally the graphic has a range from ADU=0 to ADU=65535. If you check “Auto-Stretch” the display is stretched from the lowest ADU-Value to the highest.

If “Auto-Stretch” is not selected, you can change the high value with the white arrow buttons and the low value with the gray arrow buttons. So it is possible to zoom into a desired area.

Normally all Y-pixel values of the selected range are averaged. If you have a slant (e.g. from a Littrow spectrograph), you can define this slant by pressing the “Slant” button and click on the image on the upper side of the line and then on the lower side:



You can remove the slant settings with “Reset”.

The profile can be exported with “Export CSV” or “Export DAT” with different file types. Normally the decimal comma is the one which is used on the computer, but you can force a “.” As decimal comma, if you check the box.

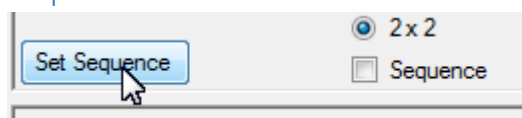
That makes sense, because the most spectrographic software are working with “.” as comma.

Every exported file generate an additional SWI file with all profile parameters, like Y-position, area, slant, etc.

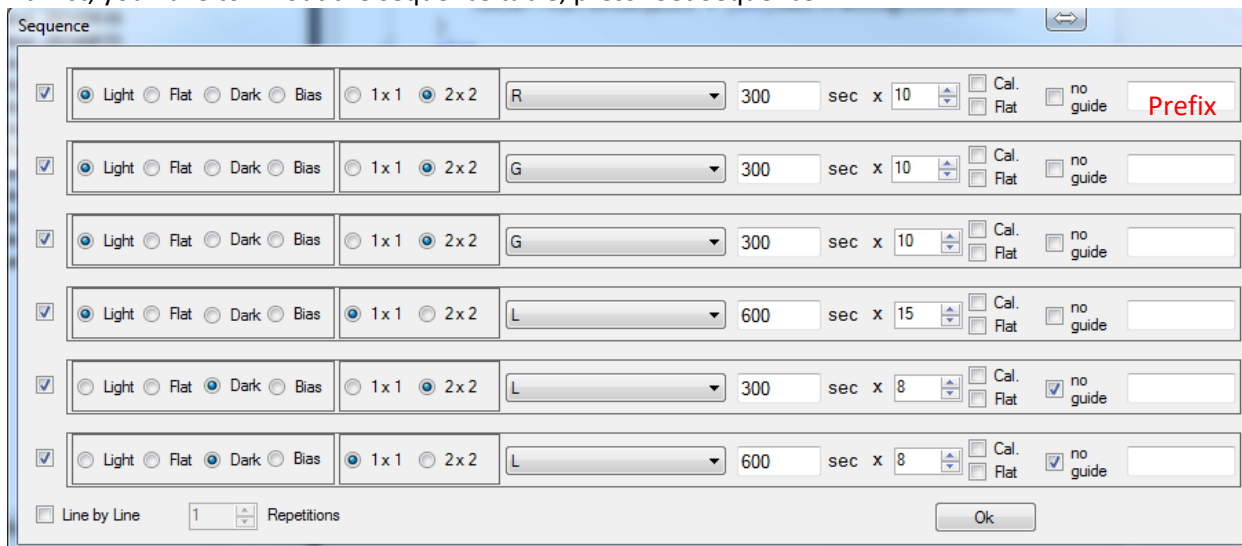
If you have different files (e.g. star spectrum and calibration lamp spectrum), you can load the parameter settings of a stored CSV file to set all parameters equal to the other image (button “load settings from exported file”).

The Profile-feature is on fresh exposed images and independent on opened images available.

Sequence



At first, you have to fill out the sequence table, press “Set Sequence”.



You have to check the left check-box if you want to use the sequence line.

Then you have to choose Light /Flat/Dark/Bias (in example 4 lines are Light. The last 2 are with closed shutter).

Next you have to set the binning 1x1 or 2x2 (in example Light is 1x1, RGB is 2x2).

Next you have to select the filter.

Next you have to set the exposure time in seconds (in example Light is 600s, RGB each 300s).

Next you have to set the number of images you want (in example Light 15, RGB each 10).

If you have my output module, you can define the outputs which should be on during the exposure.

If you mix guided imaging with unguided, you can suspend the guiding with “no guide”.

Lastly you can define a file name prefix (no prefix in this example).

ATTENTION: Normally it makes no sense to mix Light and Flat in one sequence. In case of spectroscopy, it could make sense, if you have my RS232 output box to control the flat lamp mechanic. In this case you can check the desired outputs, which should be switched on during the exposure (in the example output 1 is named “Cal.” And output 2 is named “Flat”).

To avoid guiding during a dark or bias frame (example line 5 and 6), you should select “no guide” to suspend guiding during this exposure.

Press “Ok” to close sequence table.

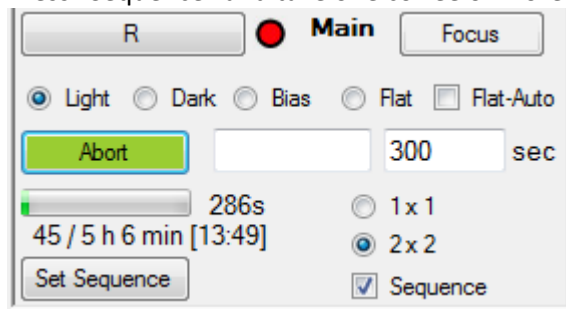
If the field “Line by Line” is unchecked, the sequence takes one image of the first active line, the next of the second active line, and so on. After reach the last position, the next image of the first active line is taken, and so on.

If the field “Line by Line” is checked, the sequence takes all images of first active line, then all images of second active line, and so on.

This makes sense if you take flat fields for different filters in a sequence!

If the field “Line by Line” is checked, you can change the field “Repetitions. For example: the value is 2, the sequence is working line by line. After finishing, it reruns again.

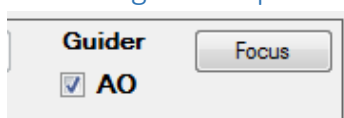
Check the box “Sequence” and the “Exposure” button turns to “Sequence” button.
Press “Sequence” and take one coffee or more....



Under the “Abort” button you see the bar for remaining time of the actual exposure.
Below of it, there is the number of remaining images (including the actual one) and the sum of exposure time (included pauses for dithering, filter change and download image. The pauses time is defined in “Settings”). Then you see the estimated end time of the sequence.

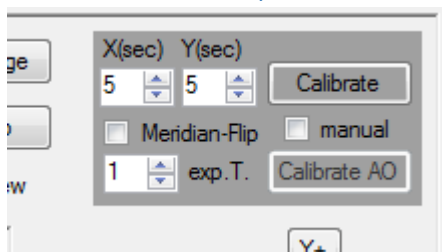
If you have checked “Automatic Refind” and the guide star is lost during a sequence, the current image is aborted. After refind-procedure automatically finds the guide star, the sequence continues and starts automatically with the aborted image again.

Focus of guide chip



The same procedure as focusing of main chip, please read this chapter (page 19).

Calibration of relays and AO



Be sure that you have connected the guiding port of camera with the guider port of your mount.
Alternative, you can guide over the ASCOM telescope mount driver. In this case you have to be connected to the mount driver and have to check “Guide over Ascom”.

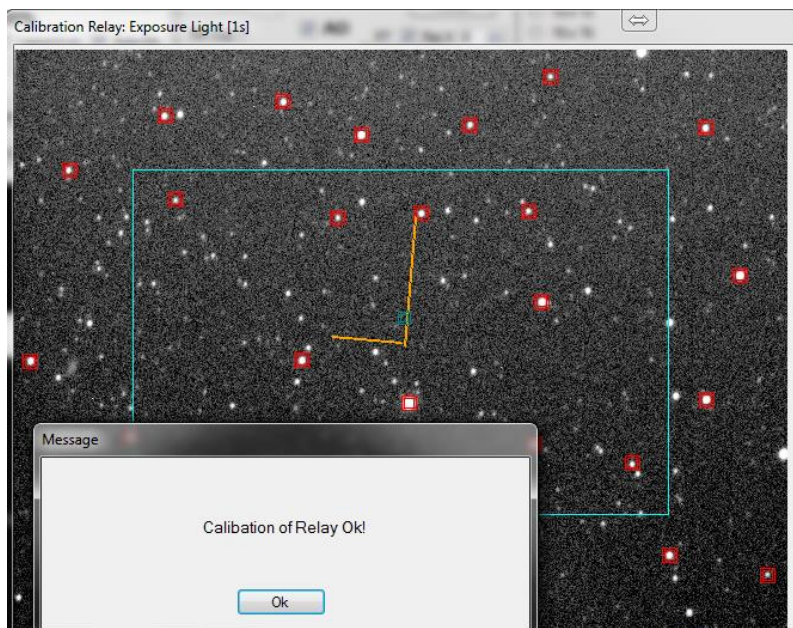
“X(sec)” and “Y(sec)” are the times for moving the X (RA) and Y (DEC) of the mount during the calibration.

The time depends on the focus length. Small focus length needs longer time to get the minimum pixel move for calibration. You must find out the optimum parameters for your equipment by trial and error.

You can define the base of exposure time of calibration, select star and reposition with “exp.T.” in seconds. The value 0 means 0.1 seconds.

At first you should position a star (not too weak) in approximate the middle of the guide chip by using “Focus” in the Guide panel.

Press “Calibrate” to start calibration for relays.



The calibration works automatically and you will see a result, like in this example.

If there are more than one stars into the blue rectangle and you haven't selected star pattern match for calibration in "Settings", SbigControl asks you to select the best star manually to avoid a confusion.

If you have checked the Parameter "Pattern" – "Use it for Calibration" in "Settings", SbigControl can work with more than one star for calibration (see left example).

If the automatic process produces a wrong result (takes in one step the wrong star, or the axis are not in a right angle), check the box "manual" and do the calibration again.

The calibration data are stored in a file, so if you close SbigControl and open it again it is not necessary to calibrate again.

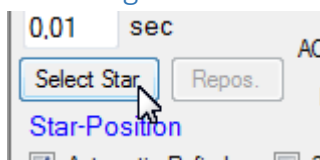
Only if you change the camera rotation against the mount axis or you change the declination axis of your telescope mount more than 5° or you make a meridian flip of your mount will you have to calibrate the relays again! In case of meridian flip, you can avoid a new calibration by check the box "Meridian-Flip". In this case the calibration data of DEC are inverted (attention, it is only working if you do not rotate the camera!).

If you have an AO, you have to calibrate it with "Calibrate AO" for one once. You do not need to calibrate it every night. Only if you demount the AO from the camera or if you install SbigControl on another computer will you have to calibrate it again.

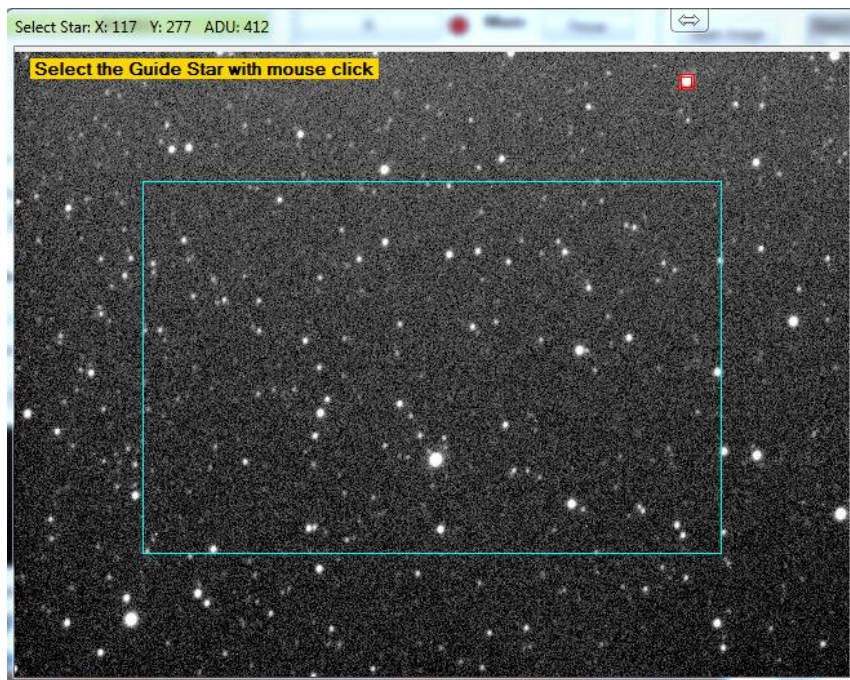
In simulator mode, the calibration data are stored only if you have never done a calibration before. This avoid overwriting real calibration data by simulator.

The calibration of AO works in the same way as for the relays. Press "Calibrate AO". This calibration is only necessary for the first time after software installation or if you dismount the AO from the camera and mount it again.

Select a guide star



Before you can guide you have to select a guide star by pressing "Select Star".

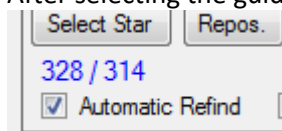


SbigControl finds automatically the best guide star. If there are more than one star, the best star is marked, but you can choose your preferred star by yourself.

In this case click on the preferred guide star.

If you move the cursor over the guide image, you can see the ADU values in the title line. Brighter stars result shorter guiding exposures and shorter reaction time!

After selecting the guide star, you can see the X, Y position of the guide star in blue letters.

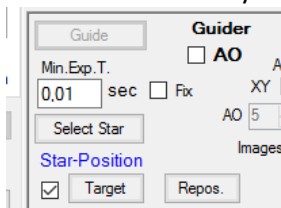


If the message "Refind Guide Star" appears, SbigControl moves the guide star back to this position on the chip!

Set the guide star target position

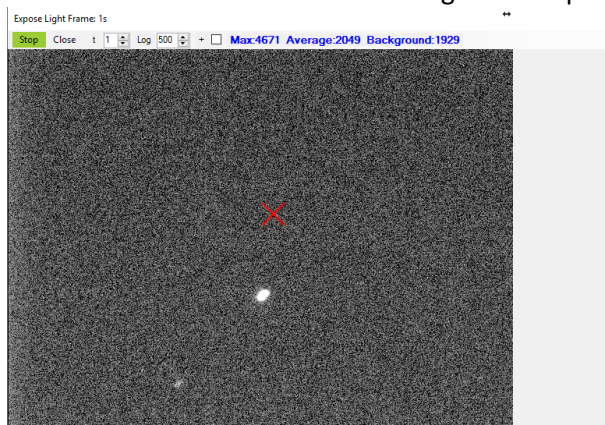
For some reasons, it makes sense to define a position on the guide chip, where the guide star should be moved, before you start the guiding. For example, on spectroscopy, you have to move the guide star on a place on the slit.

With this function you do not need to move it manually.



At first, you have to check the box left of the "Target" button. For this function, it is not allowed to have the settings parameter "Pattern: Use it for Reposition" at on.

Press "Target" to open a focus window. You can work into this window as in the normal focus window. Click with the mouse on the desired guide star position.



If you do now a “Select Star” operation and the guide star is not on the target position, an automatic reposition of guide star to the target position starts.

Automatic rebind of guide star

Check the box “Automatic Refind” if you want that SbigControl re-find and reposition guide star automatically if the guide star is lost.

If you don’t check it and the guide star is lost, guiding stops and also an imaging sequence stops.

Manual Reposition of Guide Star

Every time you press “Select Star”, Sbigcontrol stores following files in the folder C:\SbigControl\GuideStarData:

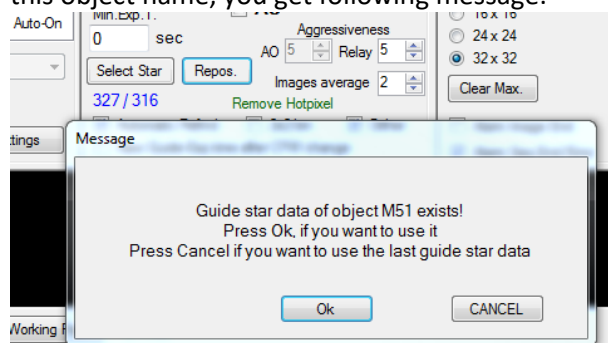
- __Actual_Dark.fit ... the dark frame image of guider
- __Actual_Light.fit ... the light frame image of guider
- __Actual.txt ... the parameters of selected guide star

If you have entered a name in the field “Object”, you get additional following files (example: Object name is M51):

- M51_Dark.fit ... the dark frame image of guider
- M51_Light.fit ... the light frame image of guider
- M51.txt ... the parameters of selected guide star

If you want to bring the guide star automatically on the last position on chip, press “Repos.”.

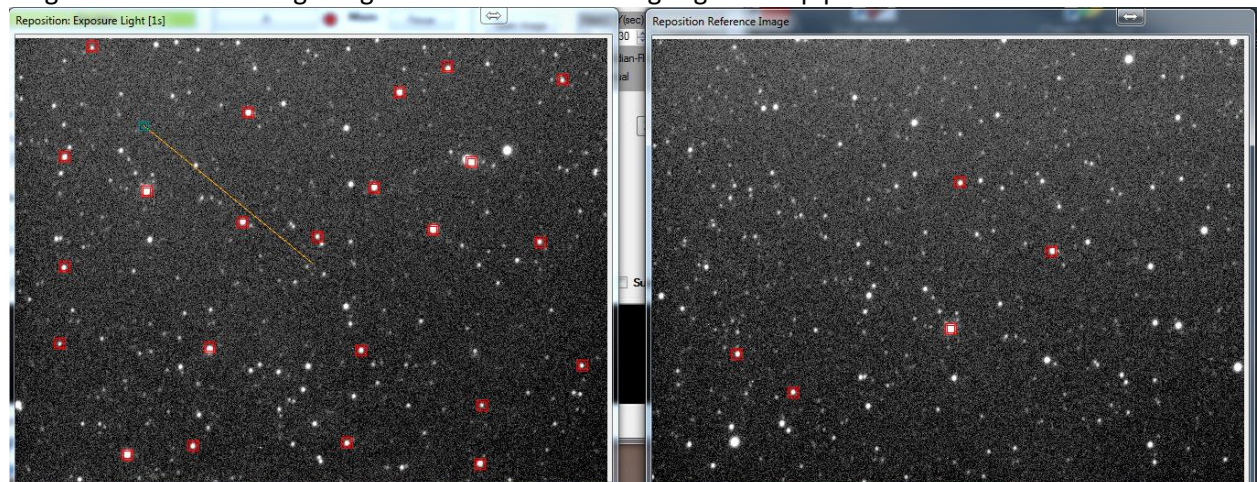
If you have entered a new name in the field “Object” and there are already exists reference data with this object name, you get following message:



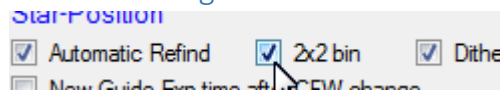
With “Ok”, the existing reference guide star for this object will be taken and the actual reference guide star will be overwritten. With “Cancel”, the actual reference star will be taken and the object reference star will be overwritten.

Two windows opens, one with the reference image, one with the actual image.

SbigControl tries to bring the guide star back on the right guide chip position.



Guider binning



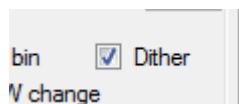
You should only check the “2x2 bin” of Guide panel if you cannot find a bright enough guide star.

Normally the guider works in 1x1 binning. This is more precise than guiding in 2x2 binning.

SbigControl works in sub-pixel mode on guiding. If you are working with 2x2 binning, the sub-pixel are calculated from a 4-times bigger pixel than in case of 1x1 binning.

If you already had selected a guide star and you change the binning of the guider, then you have to select the guide star again!

Dither

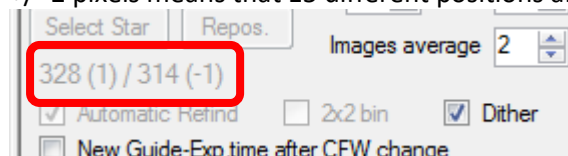


Dithering is to move each image a little bit to avoid the bad pixels are always on a fixed position. With dithering it is easy to remove bad pixel with your processing software.

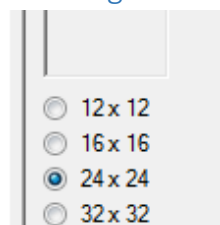
If “Dither” is checked, SbigControl holds on to the guider after each image and moves the guide star in a random direction with random number of pixels (maximum +/- 2 pixels) against the origin selected guide star position.

You can see the actual position deviation from the initial star position display in the parenthesis.

+/- 2 pixels means that 15 different positions are possible.



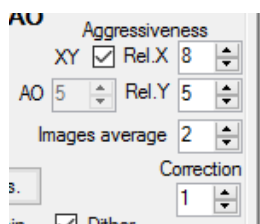
Size of guide window



You can change the size of the guide window. The effect of this is that the guiding speed increase a little bit, but not much. Therefore, normally it is better to have a bigger window to avoid losing the guide star by disturbances such as wind or vibration of the mount.

However, it is also a question of focal length and seeing, in deciding to decrease window size.

Guiding parameters: Aggressiveness, Image average, Correction



These are very important parameters to get a good guiding result. The parameters depend on your equipment (focal length, mount reaction time, ...) and also on the actual seeing and wind influences.

“Images average”:

SbigControl corrects the AO and/or the relays after each guiding exposure (if Correction = 1). But if there is a greater value than 1 entered in this field, the average of deviations of the last guider images (e.g. Image average = 4, the last 4 images) to the optimal position is the basis for correction.

With this parameter you can smooth the reaction to avoid over-reactions.

If you use AO and need very high frequency of corrections, this parameter should be small (1 or 2).

“Aggressiveness”:

If the software recognize a deviation of the guide star position, it calculates the vectors to correct the differences. But normally, if you correct it 100%, you get an oscillation through overcorrection. Change this parameter to avoid this. The optimal correction is a combination of “Image average” and “Aggressiveness”.

Formula for relay correction: $\text{correction} = \text{deviation} * \text{Aggressiveness_Relay} / 50$

Formula for AO correction: $\text{correction} = \text{deviation} * \text{Aggressiveness_AO} / 10$

If you use “Guide over Ascom”, you will need higher aggressiveness values for relay correction, because the reaction time over ASCOM is normally much lower than with relay cable.

If you check “XY”, you can define different aggressiveness of X and Y axis for the relay correction.

If you guide with AO and the tilt is higher than, for example, (+/-) 40% (parameter defined in “Settings”), the relays will activated to reposition the AO.

“Correction”:

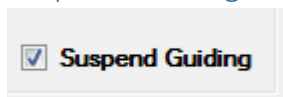
If you have an excellent mount an the guider correct more the wind influence as the mount problems, you can slow down the correction interval by increasing this parameter.

If Correction = 1, SbigControl correct the mount or AO after each guiding image. If Correction = 5, SbigControl correct the mount/AO after 5 images.

For Example on my Losmandy Titan, I use normally Correction = 1 to be able to react fast to mount problems. On my ASA DDM85, I set this parameter to a high value, because there are no mount problems. The only one problem could be that the mount pole alignment is not 100% correct, but this needs only very seldom corrections.

These parameters can changed during guiding, so you can see the reaction immediately!

Suspend Guiding

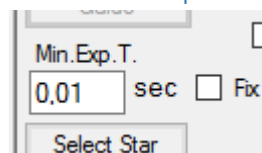


Check “Suspend Guiding” if you want to see the difference between guided und unguided imaging in the guiding window.

That makes sense in determine if jumping star is a result of overcorrection or not.

An acoustic signal reminds you to uncheck it before you start imaging.

Minimum exposure time

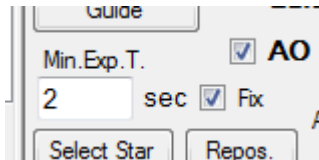


The minimum guider exposure time is usually 0.01s for Sbig guiding chips.

However, sometimes it makes sense to increase this time. If you are working without AO and you have a faint guide star, then you should increase this value to 0.5s or higher.

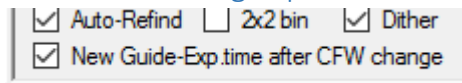
Normally the guider finds the minimum exposure time automatically to guide as fast as possible. But if the automatic time is lower than “Min.Exp.T.”, the exposure time will set to this value.

Fixed guider exposure time



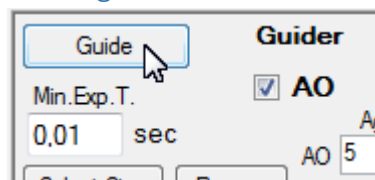
If you have a faint guide star which needs big guiding exposure times, the automatic find of exposure time could takes long time. If you know the optimal exposure time, you can enter it in “Min.Exp.T.” and check “Fix”, then the automatic of guide start exposure time is disabled and the guider works always with the entered time.

Find new Guiding Exposure Time after Filter change

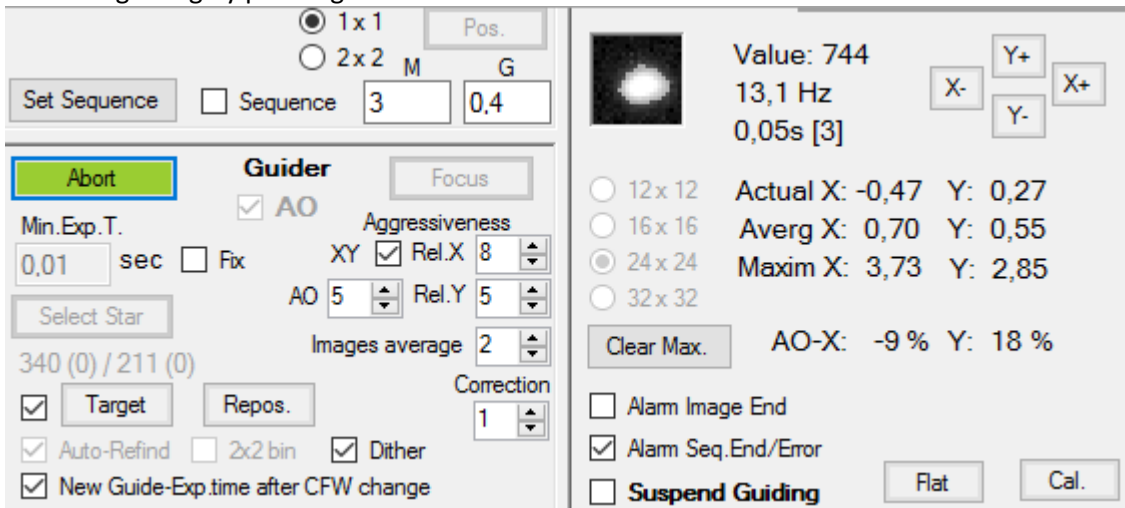


If you have an internal guide chip behind the filters, it makes sense to check this box!
Every time the filter is changed (by button click or sequence), the guider makes a test exposure and calculates the new guiding exposure time for this filter, before starting to image.
This parameter should be off, if “Fix” is checked!

Guiding



Before you can start guiding, SbigControl needs calibrate the relays and, if AO is checked, AO also. You have also to select a suitable guide star.
Start the guiding by pressing “Guide”.



Now you can see many parameters to the right of the guiding window:

- Value: actual ADU value of the star center area (average of centered 9 pixel [3x3])
- Hz: actual guiding rate in Hz (correction per seconds)
- Exposure time: actual guiding exposure time, [exposure set] – look at description below
- Actual X/Y: actual deviation in pixels
- Averg X/Y: average of deviation in pixels of the last 8 seconds (maximum 100 values)
- Maxim X/Y: maximum deviation in pixels since the guiding or imaging started
- AO-X/Y: tilt of AO (-100% to +100%, 0% is centered)

Button “Clear Max.”: clears the “Maxim” value, also during guiding.

After starting the guiding and if “fix” is unchecked, SbigControl takes a dark-corrected image with 1s exposure time to calculate the optimum exposure time for fast guiding.

After that, it takes 5 dark frames to be able to change the exposure time during guiding on the fly.

Exposure time sets:

1: $0.5 \times$ optimum exposure time

2: $0.75 \times$ optimum exposure time

3: optimum exposure time

4: $1.5 \times$ optimum exposure time

5: $2 \times$ optimum exposure time

There is a limit of maximum exposure time. It is defined in the “Settings” window.

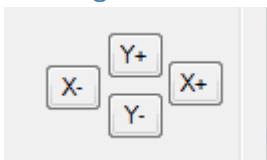
The guiding starts with exposure time set number 3: (optimum exposure time).

If the star value falls under “Start: min. ADU” minus “fade diff. ADU” (look at “Settings”) for more than “fade react [s]” time, the exposure time-set will incremented by 1.

If the star value goes over double of “Start: min. ADU” for more than “fade react [s]” time, the exposure time-set will decremented by 1.

If the star is lost more than “Loose Star Abort [s]” time, the guiding breaks and if “Automatic Refind” is checked, the guide star will searched and repositioned automatically.

Moving mount manually over guider port

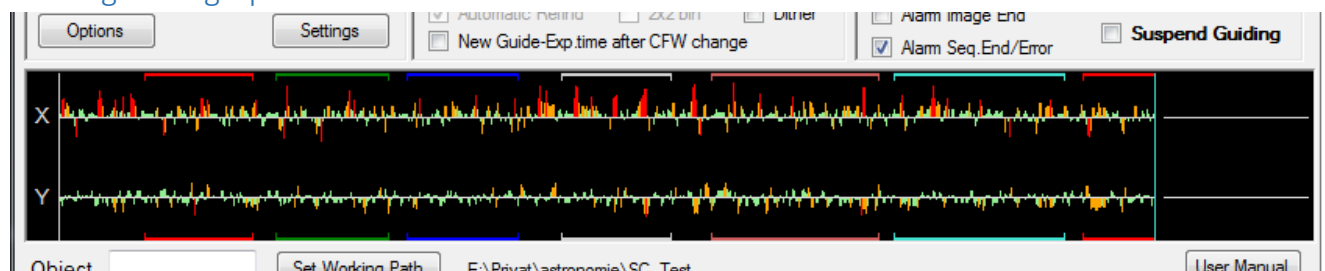


You can move the mount via the guider relays by pressing one of the 4 X/Y buttons.

The mount moves so long as the button is pressed (minimum 0.1s).

If guider is active, you can also see relay actions by the green color of the active guide relay.

Guiding error graph



Each measured and corrected guide star deviation from the target guide star position on the chip is shown in this graph as a guiding error for X and Y axis. That means if you have a guiding speed of 8 Hz you get 8 values per second.

Lines over the middle-line shows positive deviation, under the middle line: negative deviation.

- Green color: error ≤ 1 pixel
- Orange color: error ≤ 2 pixel
- Red color: error > 2 pixel

The blue line shows the actual position.

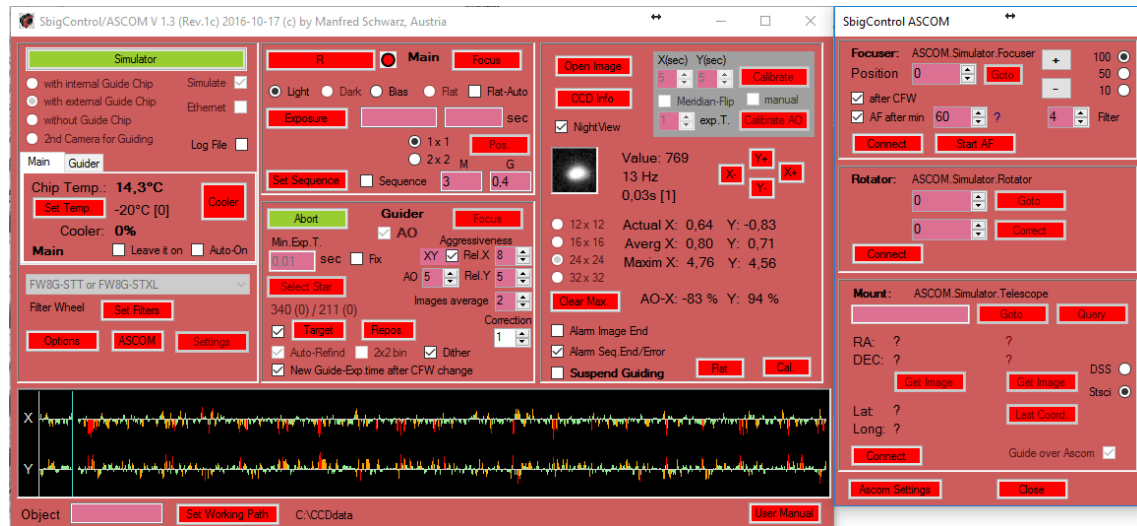
The colored lines on the top and bottom shows the imaging phases according to the used filter.

The graph display shows the last 800 guiding errors.

CCD Info

Press “CCD Info” to get the complete camera information.

Night View



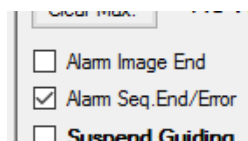
Check “Night View” to turn the control window to red.

Open image

Press open image to view a stored FITs file.

The handling is the same as the viewed exposure image (look at page 22)

Acoustic Alarms



If you check “Alarm Seq. End/Error” you will get, at the end of a sequence or after an abort sequence through error, an acoustic alarm (my favorite if I have to go to work next morning and I want to have some hours sleep during exposure).

If you check “Alarm Image End” you get an acoustic alarm for every exposure image.

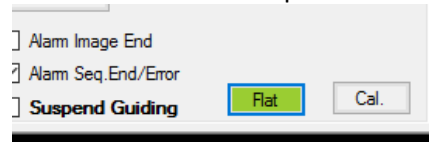
Remote Outputs

My RS232 output module have 2 transistor outputs, which can switch 12V.

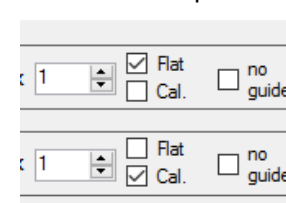
I use it to control my LHires III spectroscope calibration (ArNe lamp) and flat (tungsten lamp) unit.



You can switch the outputs manually:



Or over the sequence:



User Manual

Press “User Manual” to get this manual in PDF format on the screen. You need a PDF viewer installed on your PC.

Settings

Please be carefully when changing these values.

The

above window shows the default values.

Focus settings

You can change the focus overview binning of main chip: 1x1, 2x2, 3x3 (default) and 9x9. 9x9 is not possible for all camera types. If you use a binning mode which is not supported by the camera, SbigControl uses the next possible mode.

You can change the focus overview binning of guide chip: 1x1, 2x2 (default) and 3x3.

You can change the size of the detailed focus window. A smaller size makes the update response time for focusing faster. Default: 120, maximum 200.

On some chips you get white stripes on stars if the shutter is permanently open during focusing. In this case check “with Shutter” to avoid this. The focus speed decrease with shutter use.

If your mount isn’t right pole aligned, the monitored focus star will move out of the detailed focus window. If you check “follow star”, the detailed window position is moving over the chip to hold the star in the middle of the focus window. This works only as long as the star is in the area of the chip!

In spectroscopy, you can focus on the emission lines of a calibration lamp. But this are lines. If you select “follow star” the system is confused. In this case check “lock Y” to avoid that the focus window change the y position (emission lines have to be vertically).

Calibration of Relays

Here you can change the minimum number of pixels the star has to move on the calibration. Higher values makes the result of calibration better. Default: 40

If you have a small focal length, decrease this parameter to avoid too long axis moving times through calibration. But it makes no sense to go under 5 pixel.

Calibration of AO

AO-X and AO-Y are DAC-Values for the Digital/Analog converter of the AO tip/tilt mechanic. The maximum value of AO = +/- 2047. These two parameters set the tip of AO for X and Y on calibration. Higher values are better. Default 2016.

The 3rd parameter is the minimum number of pixels the star has to move during calibration. Default: 14.

Calibration / Star Search / Guiding

“max. diff. of Value for Refind [%]” is the maximum value change in % to accept a refind star.

This is needed on calibration and on refind guide star. Default: 40

If you have problem where the wrong star is found permanently, try to lower this value.

“Calib.Star Pixel fr.border” sets the number of pixel that the guide star has to be away from the border for calibration (blue rectangle in calibration window). Default: 100

“Remove Hotpixel” should prevent the guider taking a hotpixel as a guide star.

If you have very small stars (small focus length and/or big size pixels, undersampled), you should uncheck this parameter! For bigger focal lengths (oversampled) it makes sense to check it, to avoid hotpixels are recognized as stars. If it is checked, a median filter is used for the guider images.

“Min.Star Size” is only available if “Remove Hotpixel” is checked. It is the minimum FWHM value of the star to accept it as star. If still hotpixels are accepted as guide stars, increase this parameter.

Flat-Histo

For Auto-Flat-Time you can set the target value in histogram. Normally should be over the middle of maximum ADU values. Default: 45000

Guiding

“Start: min. ADU” is the base for calculating the guiding exposure time at the beginning of guiding. This ADU value is the target star ADU value for guiding.

If the star ADU is greater than the double of “Start: min. ADU” for more than “fade react [s]” time, the next lower exposure set becomes active.

If the star ADU is lower than “Start: min. ADU” minus “fade diff. ADU” for more than “fade react [s]” time, the next higher exposure set becomes active.

For calibration, guiding and all functions where there is a need to find the star center, the value “ADU over Average” is important. An ADU value over the actual image or sub-image average value is necessary to accept it as a star.

The reason for this is to avoid interpreting noise as stars. If you lower this value, weaker stars are accepted but also more noise errors occurs.

“Loose Star Abort [s]” is the time in seconds to break guiding after a star is lost. If “Automatic Refind” is checked, the guiding starts automatically after SbigControl has the guide star found and repositioned.

“max.Avg to start” is the maximum permitted size of the pixel deviation (averaged guiding error) to starts the imaging. This avoids starting the image if the guiding is unstable, after filter moving for example. You can see the average guiding error for X and Y on the right side of guiding window (Averg X/Y).

If you press “Exposure” or if the sequence wants to start the next exposure and the “Averg X/Y” values are greater than “max.Avg to start”, SbigControl delays starting imaging.

It makes no sense to send ultra-short impulses to the relay inputs of the mount. Set the “Min.Relay Time [ms]” to a value, which makes sense for your mount. Default: 10 milliseconds.

“AO Threshold [%]” is the maximum of AO-tilt before relay correction is done. You can change it between 20% and 80% (default: 40%).

“max.exposure time” is the maximum of guider exposure time to avoid too slow guiding. For very stable and well-adjusted mounts you can set longer times. Default: 4 seconds

Repos.min.pixel

Is the value, which is the maximum deviation in pixels that are allowed after reposition. Default: 2 pixel.

Repos.Guiders after exposure (AO checked)

If you are working with AO and want imaging to start with a centered AO, you can check this box. The “Min.AO thres.f.repos.” value is the minimum tilt of AO in %, over this value the reposition starts before the next image.

Add [s] to sequ. Calc.

The estimated time for a sequence to end is the sum of exposure times and other times like:

- Image download time
- Filter change time
- Time for finding new guider exposure time
- Stabilize time of guider after filter change

For these “other times” you can enter an approximate value, in second per image, to get an estimated end-time for the entire sequence. Default: 8s.

Remember Binning and Default Filter Pos

Both parameters have an effect on starting SbigControl and on end of sequence.

“Remember Binning” records the last selected binning (on closing the application), and uses it on starting SbigControl. Also the binning set before sequence is set back at the end of sequence.

“Default Filter Pos” is to set the filter position automatically after starting SbigControl or finishing a sequence to the entered filter position. For example you have defined Luminance at filter position 4 and you want to have this as default filter, check this parameter and enter the number 4.

STX/STXL/STT Options

STX, STXL and STT camera models support “Window heater” and “Pre-Flash” function. Check the parameter if you want to activate it.

If you have another camera model, these parameters have no effect.

2016, Sbig has changed the firmware of STXL cameras. The change effects the guider shutter.

If you have updated your STXL camera firmware and get problems to show the guide star in the small guiding window, you should check the parameter “STXL shutter handling”.

Main Image

Depending your optics, it is possible that your image is mirrored. You can flip it horizontally or vertically. If you check both, it is not mirrored, it is rotated by 180°.

Pattern

SbigControl can operate with star pattern match in case of calibration and/or re-position. That’s very helpful in case of small telescope focal length.

Pattern Match is done in following way:

In the first image on calibration or in the reference image on re-position, SbigControl searches in the center rectangle the 5 brightest stars. Then it builds triangles for all possible combination of the 5 stars. The software gets a lot of vectors with length and angles.

On the next image all bright stars will marked and all possible combinations of triangles will calculated. Then SbigControl verify all new data (vector length and angles) with the reference data, to find a correlation.

“Toler. Angel [°]”: maximal allowed deviation of angle in °

“Tol. Length [pix]”: maximal allowed deviation of vector length in pixels

Outputs

If you have connected the RS232 output module, check the parameter “Output Module”. Find the used COM port with the device manager of Windows and enter the number in the “Com” field.

The names of output 1 and output 2 can be defined by yourself, but with maximum of 4 characters. The names are shown on the buttons of the main window and on the check-boxes of the sequence. If your outputs need a settle time, you can define the On and the Off settle delays for the sequence. After switch on (or off) the output in the sequence, this time is running and after that, the exposure starts.

Separate folder for date

Normally you get automatic folders with the date and object in the folder name.

If this parameter is checked, you get a folder with the date and a subfolder with the object.

Main Chip Y-Bin x3

For spectroscopy it makes sometimes sense to bin the Y axis of the main chip to 3 to get a lower exposure time and hold the binning of X-axis at 1 to have the full resolution.

If this parameter is checked, all 1x1 binned exposures will be taken in 1x3 and all 2x2 binned in 2x3.

If these binning modes are not supported from the camera, the normal 1x1 or 2x2 binning is used.

Help and Sound

“Help Text”: Check it to get help text if you move the cursor over a control or text (all important controls and text are supported).

“Alt. Sound”: Check it to get an alternative sound on alarm. Bell-ring instead of alarm-siren.

Default Values

If you had made a mistake in parameter settings, you can press “Default Values” to set all settings back to default values.

Log File

If you check “Log File”, all auto-saved exposures are logged in the file “log.csv” in the same folder as the images are stored. You can open it, for example with Microsoft Excel. Do not open during imaging, because Excel locks the file and it is not possible for SbigControl to write additional data to this file.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1	File	Camera	Start-Time	Exp.Time [s]	Filter	Temp.[°C]	Binning	Guide-Exp.T	Guiding[Hz]	AO	Corr-X	Corr-Y	Max-X	Max-Y	Guide Star X/Y
2	M104_L_2x2_30s_-36°C_001.fit	STXL-6303	19:33:00	30	L	-35,8	1x1	0	0	-	0	0	0	0	0 Star-Position
3	M104_R_2x2_300s_-35°C_001.fit	STXL-6303	19:42:55	300	R	-35	1x1	0,08	5,2	no	-0,01	-0,01	0,52	0,54	521 (0) / 193 (0)
4	M104_R_1x1_300s_-35°C_001.fit	STXL-6303	19:58:58	300	R	-35,1	1x1	1	0,9	no	-0,02	0	0,52	0,54	343 (0) / 237 (0)
5	M104_G_1x1_300s_-35°C_001.fit	STXL-6303	20:05:51	300	G	-35	1x1	0,55	1,7	no	-0,03	-0,02	1,51	0,59	343 (0) / 237 (0)
6	M104_B_1x1_300s_-35°C_001.fit	STXL-6303	20:11:23	300	B	-35	1x1	0,51	1,6	no	-0,05	0	0,52	0,54	343 (0) / 237 (0)
7	M104_R_1x1_300s_-35°C_002.fit	STXL-6303	20:22:43	300	R	-35	1x1	0,55	1,7	no	-0,05	-0,02	0,58	1,53	339 (0) / 238 (0)

File: file name

Camera: used Sbig camera

Start-Time: Local time (PC-Time) on starting exposure

Exp.Time [s]: exposure time in seconds

Filter: used filter

Temp.[°C]: main chip temperature

Binning: main chip binning

Guide-Exp.Time [s]: exposure time of guide chip during guiding

Guiding[Hz]: update time for guiding correction in Hz

AO: AO used or not

Corr-X: average correction of X-axis during imaging

Corr-Y: average correction of Y-axis during imaging

Max-X: maximum deviation of X-axis during imaging

Max-Y: maximum deviation of Y-axis during imaging

Guide Star X/Y: X and Y position of guide star. In parenthesis the dither divergence to guide star position is shown (in pixel)

ASCOM Features

Ascom Settings

Ascom Settings

Focuser: FocusSim.Focuser

Choose 1000 Min.brightnesss 10000 Max.brig. 100 High steps 8000 Maximum 20 Sec 50 Middle steps 50 Minimum 10 Low steps 0 Backlash-Corr In Out

Rotator: ASCOM.Simulator.Rotator

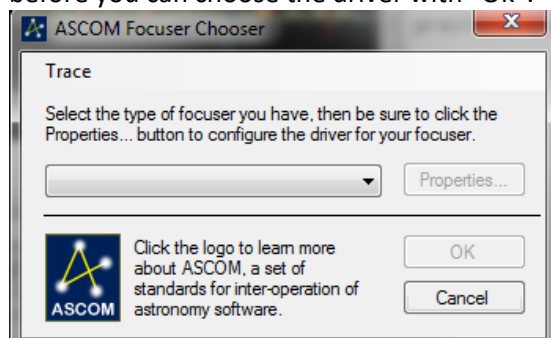
Choose Ok

Mount: ASCOM.Simulator.Telescope ☒ convert J2000 to topocentric

Choose 15 Image Width arc-min 15 Heighth

Focuser:

Click on “Choose” to select the desired ASCOM driver. Mostly you have to enter the Ascom properties before you can choose the driver with “Ok”.



The selected driver is remembered by SbigControl at the next start, so it is not necessary to choose every session the driver.

Focuser: FocusSim.Focuser

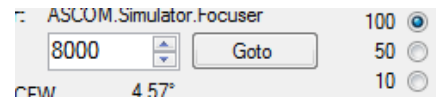
Choose 1000 Min.brightnesss 10000 Max.brig. 100 High steps 8000 Maximum 20 Sec 50 Middle steps 50 Minimum 10 Low steps 0 Backlash-Corr In Out

Minimal and maximal brightness:

The minimum and maximum ADU value for accepted stars in auto-focus mode.

High / Middle / Low steps:

Different focuser moving steps, selectable in the focuser area.



Maximum / Minimum:

Maximum and minimum allowed count of focuser position.

Sec:

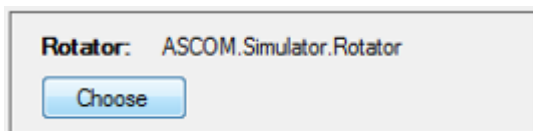
Time to average results for auto-focus.

For example you have an exposure time of 1s and an overhead-time of another one second, each focus exposure needs 2 seconds. If you have defined 20 seconds for this parameter, 10 images are averaged before SbigControl use the data to estimate the focus result. Longer time is good to remove seeing errors for autofocus.

Backlash-Corr:

Set the blue value to a number greater than 0, if your focuser has not an auto-backlash correction. In this case the auto-focus will stop every time in the selected direction “In” or “Out”.

Rotator:



Click on “Choose” to select the desired ASCOM driver. Mostly you have to enter the Ascom properties before you can choose the driver with “Ok”.

Mount:



Click on “Choose” to select the desired ASCOM driver. Mostly you have to enter the Ascom properties before you can choose the driver with “Ok”.

The most telescope mounts works with topocentric sky coordinates, that means the real coordinates at the actual time.

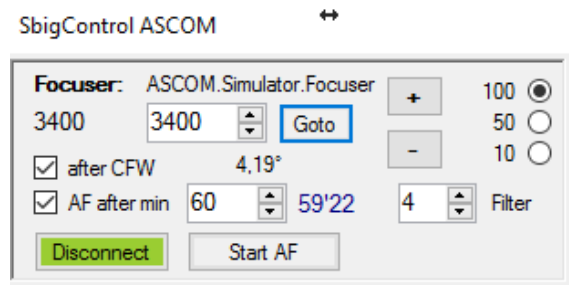
The Simbad database deliver year 2000 coordinates. If you check “convert J2000 to topocentric, the Simbad coordinates will calculated to topocentric to guarantee the right goto position.

You can download from each sky coordinate an image from STSCI or DSS database. Which “Image Width arc-min” and “Height” you can define the image area in arc minutes. You can define it similar to your chip size. There is a limit of maximum 60 arc-minutes.

Attend, that bigger images takes longer download time.

Ascom focus tool

Press “Connect” in the Ascom focus area:



Under the label “Focuser” you find the actual position of the focuser in steps.

You can enter a new position direct in the number box or can use the small arrows to step up or down with the step width, selected at side (100, 50 or 10 in this example – you can change these values in the Ascom settings).

To move the focuser, press “Goto”.

With the “+” and “-” buttons you can move the focuser without pressing the “Goto” button additionally. In this case the focuser moves the selected step width.

If the focuser has a temperature measurement, you can see the actual temperature in the middle.

Checkbox “after CFW”: force an auto-focus after each filter change

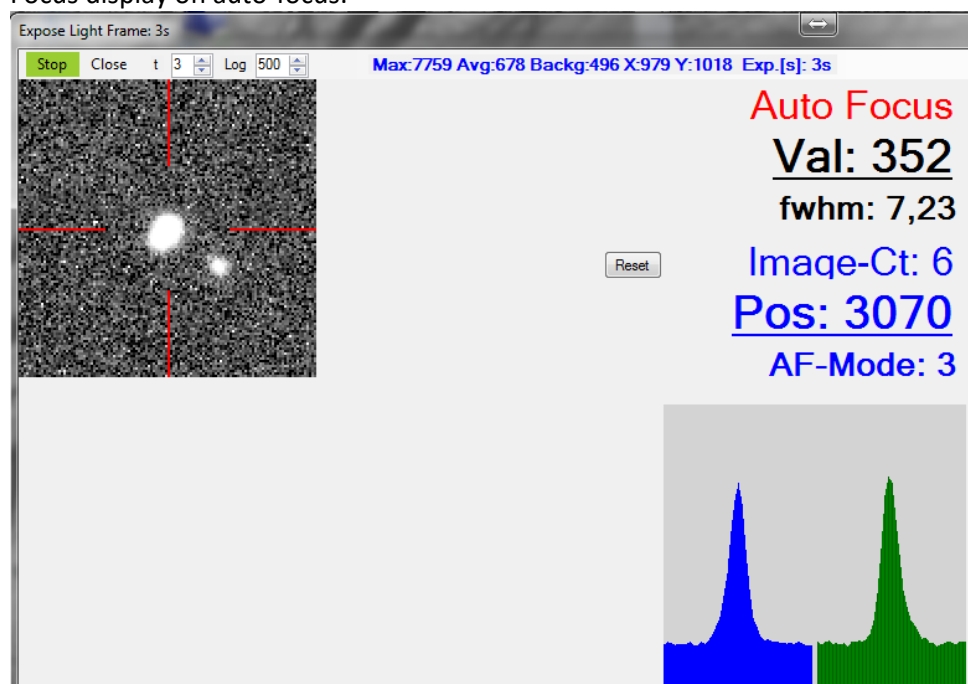
Checkbox “AF after min”: force an auto-focus periodically after each entered minutes (60 minutes in the example). The auto-focus does not break a running image. It will wait until the image is finished and then starts.

The number box with 60 in the example is the time for periodical auto-focus in minutes. The blue time beside is the timer which shows the remaining time in minutes.

The “Filter” number box is to select a filter for periodical auto-focus, in the example it is filter number 4.

You can start an auto-focus manually each time by pressing “Start AF”.

Focus display on auto-focus:



“Val” shows the actual average value of the star center (3x3 pixel)

“Fwhm” shows the Full width at half maximum value

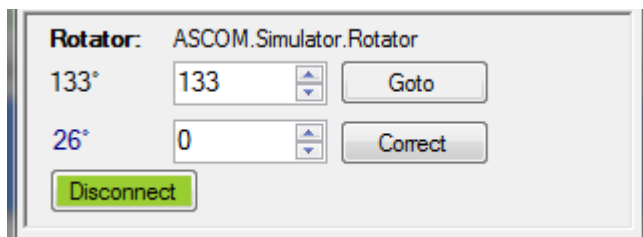
“Image-Ct” shows the number of actual images for averaging.

“Pos” shows the focuser step position.

“AF-Mode”:

- 0: AF started
- 1: Check AF-results
- 2: Move of focuser
- 3: Small steps in preferred direction after moved over the focus point
- 4: Last step to the focus point

ASCOM rotator tool



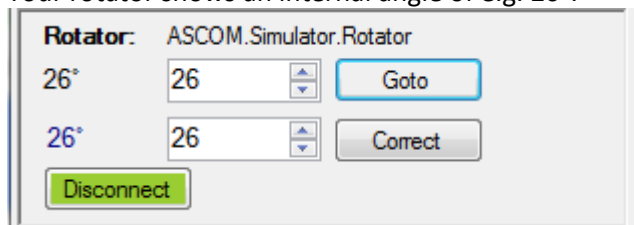
After connection of the rotator driver, you can see the two values under the label “Rotator”.

The black one (133° in the example) is the corrected position. This position should be the same as your sky map shows.

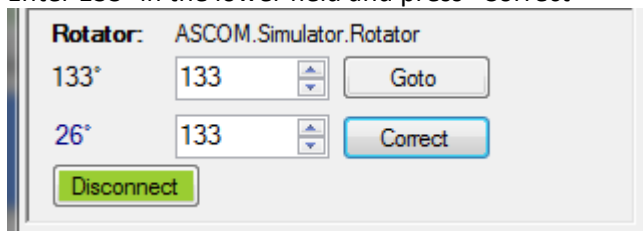
The blue one is the real internal position of the rotator.

Take an image and compare it with your sky map. For example with TheSky from Software Bisque, you can activate a Field View Indicator and can rotate it in the same position as your image is. Then you can see the rotation angle, e.g. 133°

Your rotator shows an internal angle of e.g. 26°:

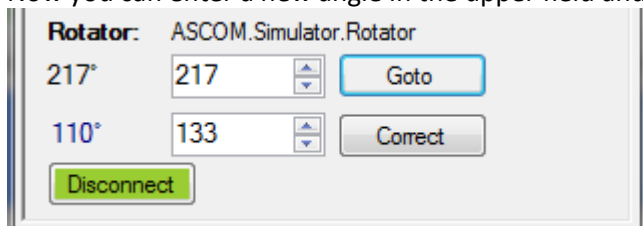


Enter 133° in the lower field and press “Correct”



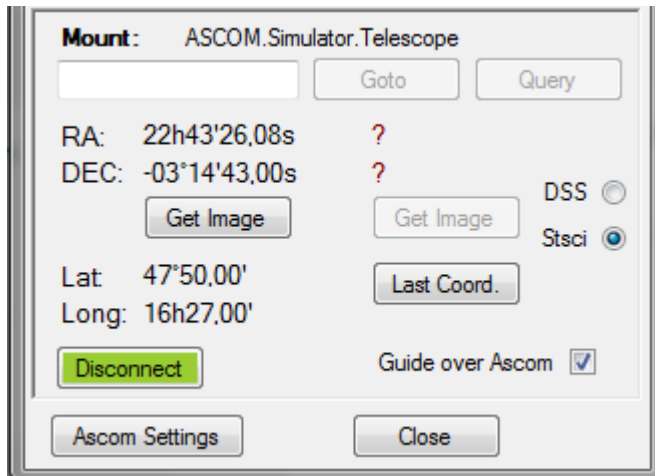
The upper value shows now the same angle as your sky map.

Now you can enter a new angle in the upper field and press “Goto” to rotate, e.g. 217°



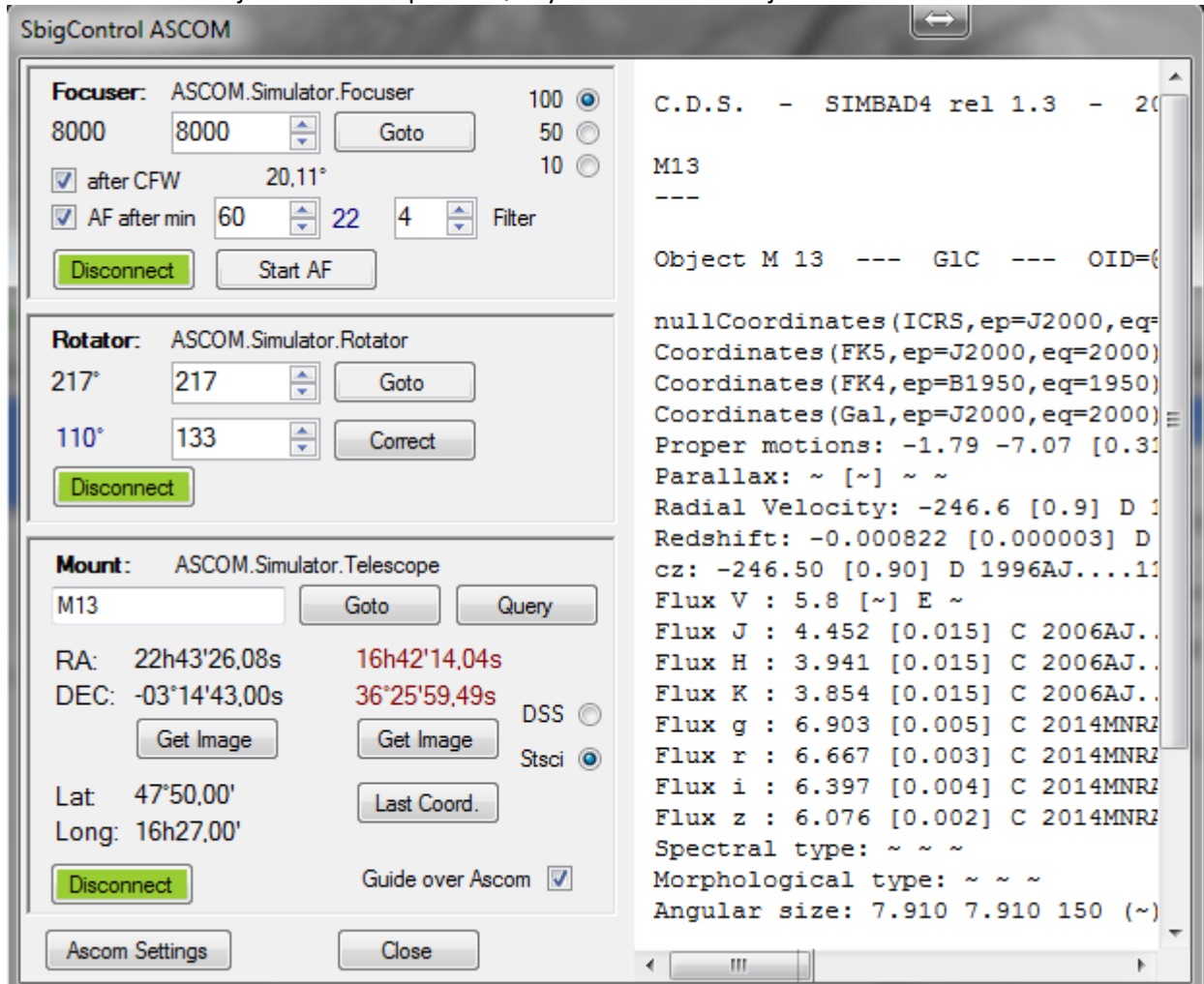
Allowed values are 0 to 359. The entered value applies to the corrected value system.

Ascom Mount



After connecting the mount driver, you can see the actual sky position in RA and DEC and the latitude and longitude which is stored in the mount.

You can enter an object name and press “Query” to search this object in the Simbad database.



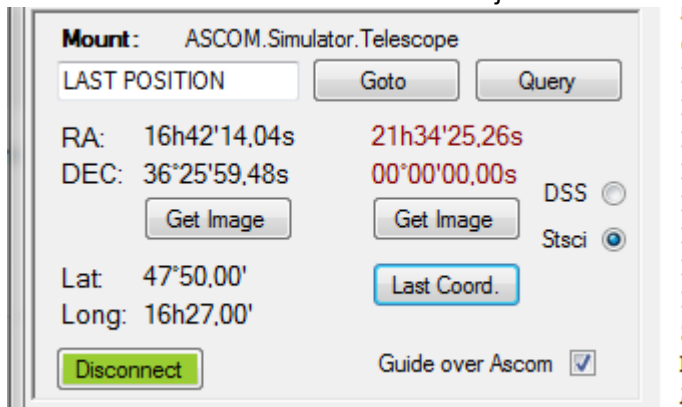
On the right side. The object information are displayed. You can increase the window size or use the scroll bars to read all information.

At the same time the object coordinates are shown in brown letters. If you have checked “convert J2000 to topocentric” in the Ascom settings, the topocentric coordinates are displayed.

If you press “Goto”, the mount will move to the object.

Sometimes you will image one object over more nights.

There is an easy way to go to the exact position of the last image of this object by pressing “Last Coord.”. Every time you take an image, an extra file is created with the object name, which includes the actual sky coordinates. If you enter e.g. at next day the same object name **in the main window** and press “Last Coord.” In the Ascom mount window, SbigControl will read the coordinates from the file and you can use the “Goto” button to move to the object.



If you don't want to guide via the camera guiding port, you can check “Guide over Ascom”. Attend, that most Ascom mount driver are much slower than the guiding port of the camera. Mostly it makes sense to increase the “relay aggressiveness” extremely.

If your telescope mount isn't well aligned and if your pointing model is not exact, the chip will not positioned exactly on the object after “Goto”. Some Object are very faint and it is not easy to position it to the center of the chip manually.

For that reason, you can download an image of a professional data base. The image could be in the same size as your chip is (look at Ascom settings). Then you can compare it with the stars of a short exposure of your current position.

You can select one of following databases:

- DSS (Digitized Sky Survey from ESO) in FIT format
- Stsci (Space Telescope Science Institute) in GIF format

If you use the Scsti base, you get a GIF image. It is very easy to save the file by right click into the image and “Save image as” option. The image is shown in a browser window.

If you use the DSS base, you get a FIT image in a new independent SbigControl-window. You can handle it like your own FIT images (zoom, mirror, etc.)

There are two “Get Image” buttons. One under the black mount coordinates and one under the brown object coordinates. Each button gets the image of the upper shown position.

Known Problems

Installation Problem by using Tools like Norton

Some tools mark SbigControl as unknown software and it is possible that the EXE file is deleted by this software or moved to a quarantine area.

In this case, please try to enter an exception for sbigControl.exe in these tools.

Problem on displaying controls and text

The development was made under Win 7 and Win 8.1 with the standard display scheme (e.g. Windows 7 scheme) and with 100% text/control size (standard).

If there are different settings, it is possible that text or controls are bigger and does not fit or are smaller as in the pictures of this manual.

Problem with Preflash option on STT8300

There is a hardware problem of the STT8300 camera with the preflash. The illumination is not homogeny. Sbig knows the problem, but there is no documentation about.

Please uncheck the preflash option in "Settings" for STT8300 cameras.

Frequently Asked Questions

After start SbigControl I get the message: "missing MSVCR120.dll"

The "Microsoft Visual C++ 2013 Redistributable (X86)" is missing. Install it by starting vcredist_x86.exe, it is a part of the downloaded installation ZIP file.

My Sbig camera is connected with Ethernet but SbigControl don't find it

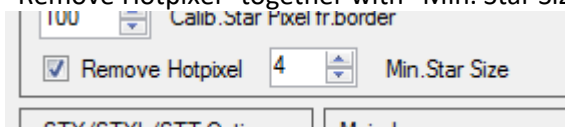
You have to set the Ethernet parameters of your Sbig camera before SbigControl can find it.

- Connect your camera via USB to your PC and switch it on
- Start CCDops (delivered with your camera, or download it from www.sbig.com)
- Select Camera -> STX/STT -> IP Properties...
- Check DHCP option
- Select Camera -> Shutdown and leave CCDops
- Switch camera off
- Connect the camera to your router or Ethernet switch
- Switch camera on
- Start SbigControl and wait a little bit, it can take time until camera gets the IP from your router
- Check Ethernet on SbigControl and then connect
- The camera should be find now and the IP is shown under the Ethernet checkbox

Why it is not possible to select a displayed guide star?

Also if you can see the star on the display after pressing "Select Star", it is not guaranteed that SbigControl will accept it as star. Two parameters of "Settings" are important for this:

- a) "Remove Hotpixel" together with "Min. Star Size"



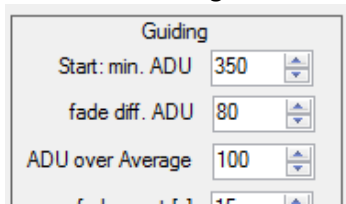
You should only check "Remove Hotpixel" if you are working with longer focal lengths.

If the stars are very small (undersampled) and you have checked it, the software can interpret the star as a hotpixel and not as star.

If you are in a situation of having smaller stars and also hotpixels, you can check "Remove Hotpixel" but you should change "Min. Star Size" to a lower value to find out the limit between real stars and hotpixels.

If you have a long focal length and you have checked "Remove Hotpixel" and still have problems where hotpixel are interpreted as stars, increase "MinStar Size".

b) "ADU over Average"



To accept a star as a star the following calculation is done:
 $\text{starValue} > (\text{imageAverage} + \text{"ADU over Average"})$

starValue is an average of 3x3 pixel around the star center
imageAverage is the average of all pixels in the image or the sub-image in case of guiding-window or focusing-window.

This calculation is done to get a gap between noise and real data. If you have troubles where weak stars are not accepted, you can decrease the value of "ADU over Average", but the chances to misinterpret a noise as data is higher in this case.

Note: Only if the star is accepted as a star, the "Guide" button become active!

Software Version Release Notes

V1.3 (Rev.1c) - 2016-11-06

- Exposure time for Calibration/Select Star/Reposition expanded with 0 value. That means exposure time of 0.1s
- New checkbox/button "Target" in guiding area. You can define a desired guide star position on the chip. After "Select Star", the guide star is moved automatically to the defined target position (e.g. to bring the star to the slit area of a spectroscope).
- Additional guiding parameter on main screen: Correction. Higher values slow down the guiding corrections without change of guiding exposure time (before you had to set the minimum guiding exposure time to a higher value, if you wanted to slow down the correction speed)

V1.3 (Rev.1b) - 2016-09-14

- Soft-Cool-Down and Soft-Cool-Up with smoother operation, because I had still ice problems before

V1.3 (Rev.1a) - 2016-07-31

- New Setting for STXL cameras: The firmware of STXL cameras has changed 2016. The shutter handling of guiding chip was changed. If you have the problem that the guide star disappears at starting the guiding, please change the new parameter: "STXL shutter handling".
- New Feature: Manual position of the object on the main chip similar to the guide chip, both chips are displayed at the same time
- ASCOM Focuser: Plus/Minus buttons to change and drive the focuser direct without Goto button (suggestion of Gert Gottschalk)

- FITs Header with RA (OBJECTRA) and DEC (OBJECTDEC) if you are connected to your telescope mount via ASCOM (suggestion of Chris Duffey)
- New Settings parameter: separate folder for date and object (suggestion of Morris Jones)
- New Set Cooler parameter: soft time steps in s, to slow down the cool down/warm up sequence in case of freezing chip
- Support of output module via RS232 (Please email ms@astrophoto.at for more information)
- Mix of guided and unguided exposures possible in the sequence.

V1.2 (Rev.2d) - 2016-05-20

- New checkbox in guiding area "fix": suppress the 5 dark frames in auto-exposure on start guiding and works with the fixed time, entered in the minimum guiding exposure time field. Avoids boring waiting times on long guiding exposures
- Bugfix: on long guiding exposure times (sometimes it made shorter times as the entered minimum time)
- Profile: Alternative "DAT" export to existing "CSV" export

V1.2 (Rev.2c) - 2016-01-28

- Fix of: Simbad has changed the text format for the J2000 coordinates.

V1.2 (Rev.2b) - 2016-01-12

- Reposition: Bugfix on reposition with checked 2x2 guider binning
- Win 8: Problems with starting SbigControl

V1.2 on Win 8 computers solvedV1.2 (Rev.2a) - 2015-12-28

- ASCOM mount: "Last Coord." button to move the mount to the last position of the selected object
- Settings: max. exposure time for guiding
- Change of base exposure time of calibration/select star/reposition possible
- different settings are loaded for "Option" left side and right side
- convert J2000 coordinates from Simbad to topocentric coordinates (checkbox in ASCOM settings)

V1.2 (Rev.1) - 2015-11-26

- 1D Profile: Slant function

- Image window and profile window size and parameter stored and restored on next program call
- 1D Profile: Load settings of an previous saved profile

V1.2 (Rev.0) - 2015-09-16

- FWHM display instead of diameter of star during focusing
- Graphic display of star profile in X and Y during focusing
- 1D profile on loaded or exposed images (nice for spectrography) with CSV export
- ASCOM 6.1 support for focusing (autofocusing) and rotator (already exists in special previous revisions)

V1.1 (Rev.3 + 4) - 2015-02-18

- Possibility to separate the aggressiveness of relay X and Y
- Resolved of failure: no change on "Log"-value on detailed focus windows

V1.1 (Rev.2) - 2015-02-07

- Prefix for file names, also for sequence
- No filter name in file name in case of no filter wheel is defined

V1.1 (Rev.1) - 2014-10-17

- Complete reorganization of internal structure (programming structure and camera communication)
- Ethernet support
- Support of extra guiding camera (e.g. STi)
- Continuous update of guiding graph and marking of imaging active
- Cooler: "Soft warm-up"
- Bias radio button: switch automatically to lowest exposure time and file name begins with "Bias_"
- Help text on cursor over control (switchable in Settings)
- Focus and imaging: cross-hair checkbox to find chip center
- Focus: better solution for changing exposure time

- Focus: bigger data display for detailed focus values
- Color Filter: colored symbols additional to filter text
- Select color filter: click on filter radio button changes immediately the filter (no "Ok" press is necessary)
- "New Guide-Exp.time after CFW change" checkbox: if you have a guide chip behind the filter, check it to get new guide exposure measurement after filter change
- Image: "Delete" button to remove the file from disk
- "Object" field: If you have nothing entered in object field, you get a warning that file will be unsaved
- Settings: focus "with Shutter" checkbox. If unchecked, shutter is open during whole focus activity
- Settings: "Flat-Histo": target brightness value for auto flats
- Settings: "Loose Star Abort [s]": time to break the image or sequence if star is lost
- Settings: "Add [s] to sequ. calc.": additional time in seconds per image (for download and filter change) for sequence time calculation
- Generally better handling with buttons and colors of buttons
- Sequence: display the calculated end time, e.g. "23 / 1 h 53 min [22:46]"
- Histogram-Display: shows now every time the histogram of the real data and not the histogram of the displayed data
- Meridian-flip checkbox for relay calibration
- Alternative Sound ("Settings")
- Star pattern match for calibration and re-position
- Detailed focus sub-window follows the star, if it is moving
- Compiled with VC++ 2013, you need Visual C++ 2013 Redistributable
- Installation with setup.exe, no manual file copy is necessary
- .NET 4.5 and Visual C++ 2013 Redistributable downloadable from www.astrophoto.at
- several bug-fixes

V1.0 (Rev.9) - 2014-07-01

- New "Settings" parameter: "Repos.min.pixel" defines the minimum divergence after repositioning the guide star to the target value

- New "Settings" parameter: "Repos.Guiders after exposure (AO checked)", after each exposure SbigControl checks the tilt of AO and if it's over "Min.AO thres.f.repos." an automatic reposition follows

V1.0 (Rev.8) - 2014-06-22

- Problem of sometimes shifted images solved
- New "Settings" parameter: STX/STXL/STT "Window Heater" and "Pre-Flash"
- New "Settings" parameter: "Remember binning" to reset binning to last setting after program start and after sequence finishing
- New "Settings" parameter: "Default Filter Pos" to reset filter position to defined filter after program start and after sequence finishing
- New checkbox "Leave it On" to leave the cooler on by disconnecting camera or closing program

V1.0 (Rev.7) - 2014-06-21

- Slow download speed of some cameras solved! Works now with maximum download speed.
- losing guide star: problem solved that SbigControl switched immediately to guide-step 5 without taking care on "fade react [s]" timeout
- error message: "ERROR: Division through 0: DisFunc.cpp (494)" sometimes if guide star is lost: solved

V1.0 (Rev.5) – 2014-06-15

- New "Settings" parameter: AO-Threshold (previous it was fixed +/- 40%)
- "Abort" button of guide and exposure: shows now "..wait.." after activated but software needs time to abort function
- After pressing "Abort" on guiding, some guiding values are hidden to avoid confusion
- Bug-Fix: Zoom of image window to 2:1 - wrong error message removed
- Bug Fix: Images with width which is not divide-able through 4 was incorrectly displayed before
- Bug Fix: Select Star: if no star found, no coordinates are displayed on star position (previous 0 / 0 was displayed)
- Manual: add FAQ chapter, add version release notes

