



Vera C. Rubin Observatory  
Systems Engineering

# An Interim Report on the ComCam On-Sky Campaign

Many authors

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**DRAFT**



## Abstract

A summary of what we have learned from the initial period of ComCam observing

Draft

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# An Interim Report on the ComCam On-Sky Campaign

## 1 Introduction

The Vera C. Rubin Observatory on-sky commissioning campaign using the Commissioning Camera (ComCam) began on 24 October 2024 and is forecasted to continue through mid-December 2024. This interim report provides a concise summary of our understanding of the integrated system performance based tests and analyses conducted during the first weeks of the ComCam on-sky campaign. The emphasis is distilling and communicating what we have learned about the system. The report is organized into sections to describe major activities during the campaign, as well as multiple aspects of the demonstrated system and science performance.

### Warning: Preliminary Results

All of the results presented here are to be understood as work in progress using engineering data. It is expected at this stage, in the middle of on-sky commissioning, that much of the discussion will concern open questions, issues, and anomalies that are actively being worked by the team. Additional documentation will be provided as our understanding of the demonstrated performance of the as-built system progresses.

### 1.1 Charge

We identify the following high-level goals for the interim report:

- **Rehearse workflows for collaboratively developing documentation** to describe our current understanding of the integrated system performance, e.g., to support the development of planned Construction Papers and release documentation to support the Early Science Program [RTN-011]. This report represents an opportunity to collectively exercise the practical aspects of developing documentation in compliance with the policies and guidelines for information sharing during commissioning [SITCOMTN-076].
- **Synthesize the new knowledge** gained from the ComCam on-sky commissioning cam-

campaign to inform the optimization of activities between the conclusion of the ComCam campaign and the start of the on-sky campaign with the LSST Camera (LSSTCam).

- **Inform the Rubin Science Community** on the progress of the on-sky commissioning campaign using ComCam.

Other planned systems engineering activities will specifically address system-level verification ([LSE-29] and [LSE-30]) using tests and analysis from the ComCam campaign. While the analyses in this report will likely overlap with the generation of verification artifacts for systems engineering, and system-level requirement specifications will serve as key performance benchmarks for interpreting the progress to date, formal acceptance testing is not an explicit goal of this report.

**The groups within the Rubin Observatory project working on each of the activities and performance analyses are charged with contributing to the relevant sections of the report.** The anticipated level of detail for the sections ranges from a paragraph up to a page or two of text, depending on the current state of understanding, with **quantitative performance** expressed as summary statistics, tables, and/or figures. The objective for this document is to **summarize the state of knowledge of the system**, rather than how we got there or “lessons learned”. The sections refer to additional supporting documentation, e.g., analysis notebooks, other technotes with further detail, as needed. Given the timelines for commissioning various aspects of the system, it is natural that some sections will have more detail than others.

The anticipated milestones for developing this interim report are as follows:

- 18 Nov 2024: Define charge
- 4 Dec 2024: First drafts of report sections made available for internal review
- 11 Dec 2024: Revised drafts of report sections made available for internal review; editing for consistency and coherency throughout the report
- 18 Dec 2024: Initial version of report is released

### Warning: On-sky Pixel Image Embargo

All pixel images and representations of pixel images of any size field of view, including individual visit images, coadd images, and difference images based on ComCam commissioning on-sky observations must be kept internal to the Rubin Observatory Project team, and in particular, cannot be included in this report. Embargoed pixel images can only be referenced as authenticated links. See [SITCOMTN-076] for details.

## 2 System Performance Analysis

## 3 Active Optics System Commissioning

## 4 Image Quality

## 5 Data Production

## 6 Calibration Data

## 7 Science Pipelines Commissioning Observations

## 8 Throughput for Focused Light

## 9 Delivered Image Quality and PSF

Image quality and PSF modeling are closely tied to the progress of the AOS system, and here is what can be concluded halfway through the data gathering with ComCam.

### On Image Quality:



Filter	Number of Visits	Mean PSF FWHM	STD PSF FWHM
All	775	1.12	0.23
u	28	1.49	0.08
g	86	1.07	0.14
r	307	1.18	0.22
i	203	1.09	0.24
z	85	1.01	0.21
y	66	1.04	0.18

TABLE 1: Summary of PSF FWHM statistics. Data are from DRP from 2024-11-01 to 2024-11-28.

The best image quality achieved so far is 0.7 arcsec, with a median of 1.1 arcsec during science visits. As shown in Table 1 and Figure 1, the PSF FWHM as a function of observation dates highlights the progress. It is important to note that all these data were collected during the AOS testing and validation phase. This makes the achieved image quality even more encouraging, demonstrating significant progress.

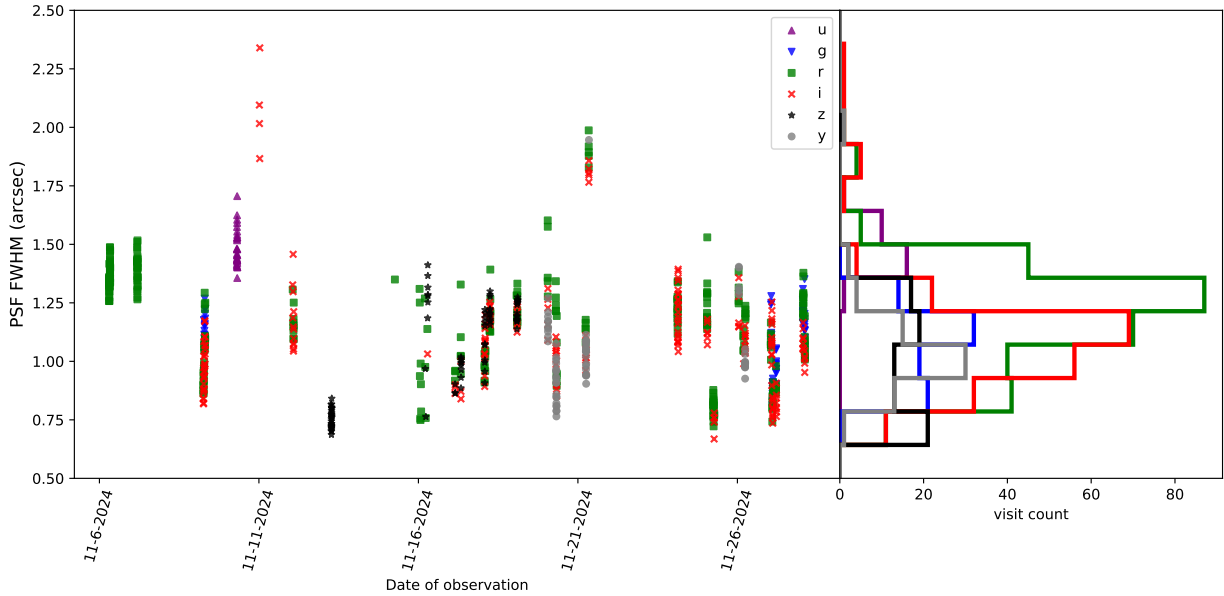


FIGURE 1: PSF FWHM as a function of the observed date. Data are from DRP from 2024-11-01 to 2024-11-28.

### On PSF Modeling:

Two different PSF models are currently used in the DM pipeline: PSFEx, which provides a

fast preliminary PSF estimation, and Piff, used later in the pipeline for more accurate PSF modeling. During the initial data collection with ComCam and AOS testing, most in-focus star shapes exhibited doughnut-like patterns, reflecting residual optical aberrations that had not yet been corrected. This specific form of asymmetry posed challenges for PSF modeling and was not typical. Interestingly, Piff, despite being the more advanced model, struggled to handle the large, non-symmetric PSFs compared to PSFEx. Fig. 2 shows how we were able early in the observation to constrain the PSF.

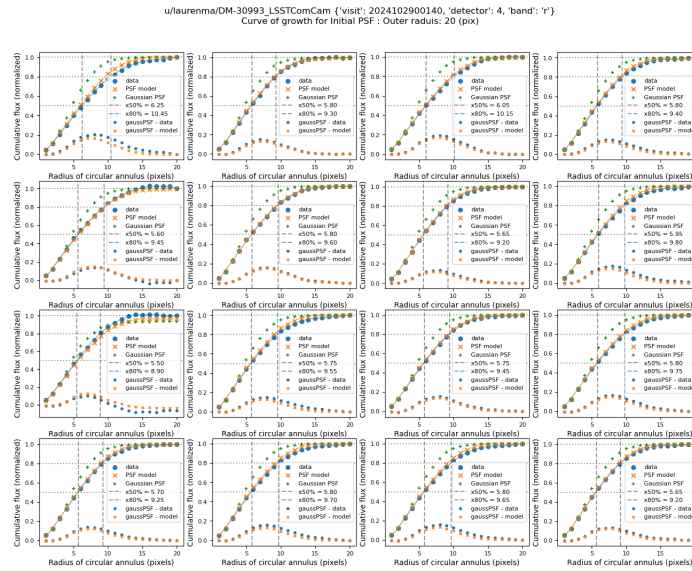


FIGURE 2: Growth curves of the PSF compared to its model (PSFEx here) in the early data taken with ComCam.

However, as the AOS system improved image quality and produced more symmetric PSFs, we observed behavior more consistent with expectations for both PSFEx and Piff. Analysis of second-moment reconstructions shows that PSFEx has a systematic offset in size reconstruction compared to Piff, which aligns with observations from DES. Overall, Piff demonstrates better PSF reconstruction, as illustrated in Fig. 3.

### On Understanding PSF Physics:

With LSSTCam, we aim to leverage wavefront sensor data to estimate the optical system's current state and model the optical contribution to the PSF, ultimately building a physical PSF model. During AOS testing with ComCam, the optical state was estimated using out-of-focus images to predict the optical contribution to PSF shape. A ray-tracing analysis showed that the optics fitted from these images could predict the PSF shape, providing strong evidence

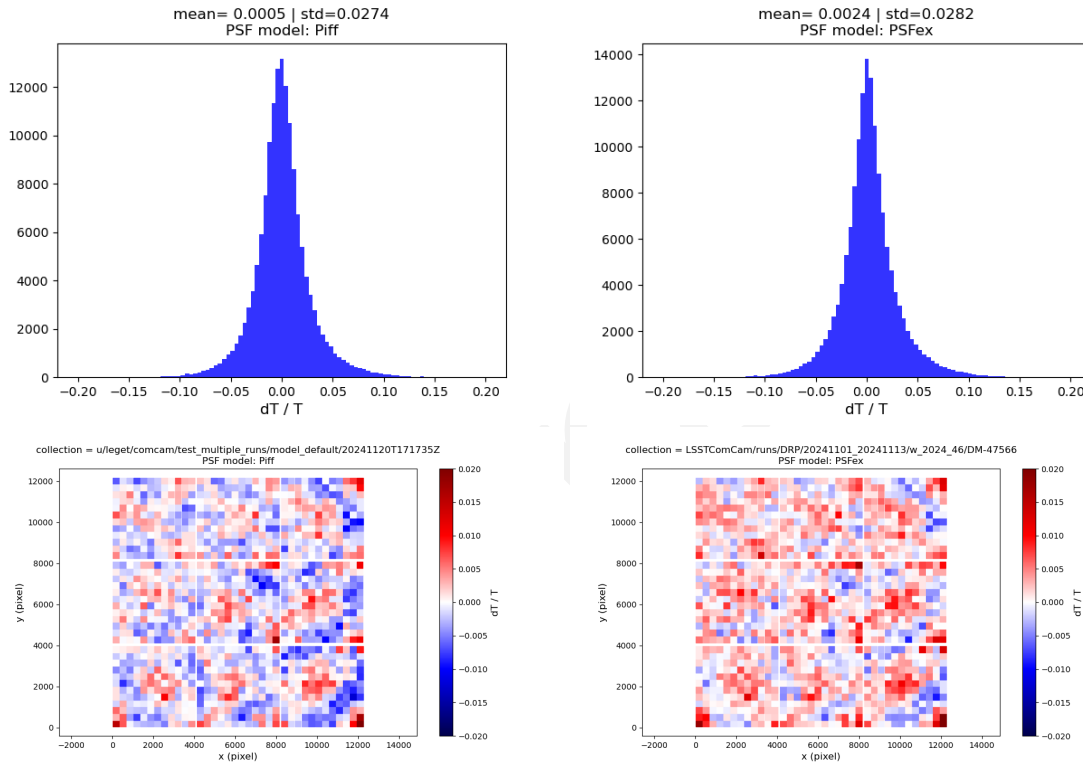


FIGURE 3: Size residuals for Piff and PSFex (1d distribution and 2d average across visits). Piff has no offset and smaller scatter. Both panels exhibit spatial structure across the focal plane, based on spatial averages across all science visits. The PSF is modeled per CCD in pixel coordinates using a second-order polynomial for interpolation. The observed structure is unlikely to result from atmospheric or dome effects, given that this plot represents an average across visits. Instead, it likely reflects spatial variations not captured by the second-order polynomial interpolation, such as optical aberrations or sensor anomalies.

that a physical PSF model could be developed for LSSTCam (See Fig. 4)

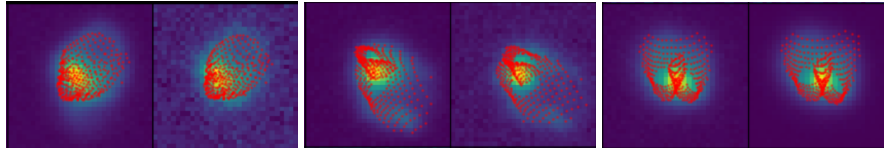


FIGURE 4: In-focus stars and prediction from the ray tracing on predicting PSF shape (red-dot). Optics parameters on the ray tracing side were derived from out of focus images by measuring optical aberration on "donuts" (out of focus star).

## 10 Instrument Signature Removal

The quality of the instrument signal removal (ISR) has improved during commissioning, as we create and deploy updated calibration products that better represent the LSSTComCam system. The following discussion summarizes our current understanding of a variety of features, both expected and newly seen on LSSTComCam, and presents our expected prognosis of the behavior of the full LSSTCam.

### 10.1 Phosphorescence

There are regions on some of the detectors (most visible in R22\_S01, detector=1) which show bright emission, particularly at bluer wavelengths, as shown in Figure 5. This is believed to be caused by a thin layer of remnant photo-resist from the manufacturing process that remained on the detector surface, and is now permanent due to the subsequent addition of the anti-reflective coating. In addition to the large areas, there are also discrete point-source-like or cosmic-ray-like defects caused by accumulations of this material. Adding to the difficulty of mitigating these defects is that this photo-resist is known to be phosphorescent, explaining why these regions are more noticeable in the bluer filters.

The initial studies of this show that these features can continue to emit light up to several minutes after they've been illuminated. Due to the long duration of these features, we decided to place manual defect masks over the worst regions. The first of these manual masks takes up about 3.5% of that detector, smaller than but consistent with estimates that this would create a pixel loss of approximately one amplifier.

The ITL detectors in LSSTCam are believed to have been cleaned better, so this should be less

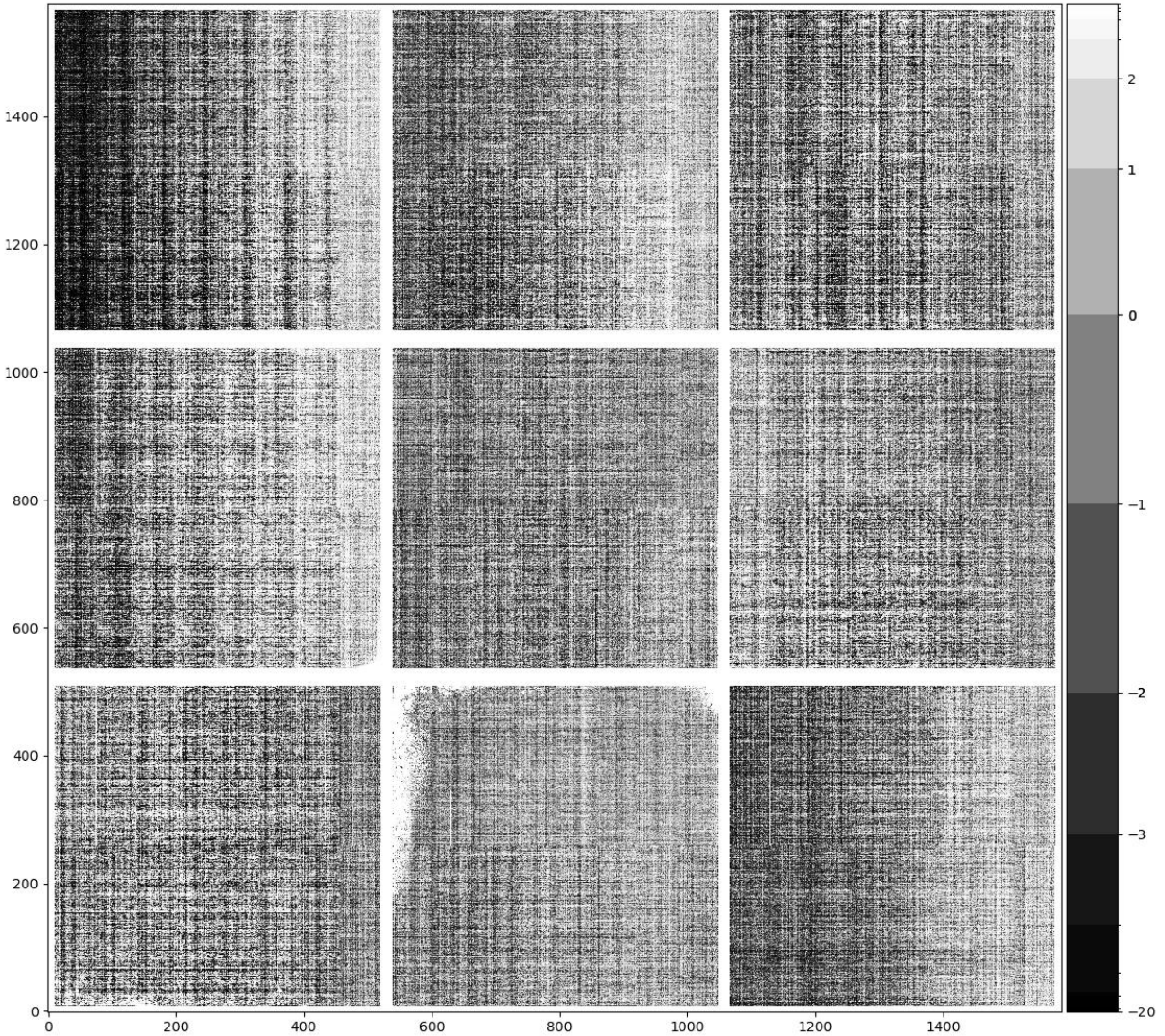


FIGURE 5: The phosphorescence seen in R22\_S01, shown here in a dark exposure taken after a series of twilight flats (exposure=2024112000065). This material absorbs light at bluer wavelengths and re-emits that energy over a wide range of wavelengths.

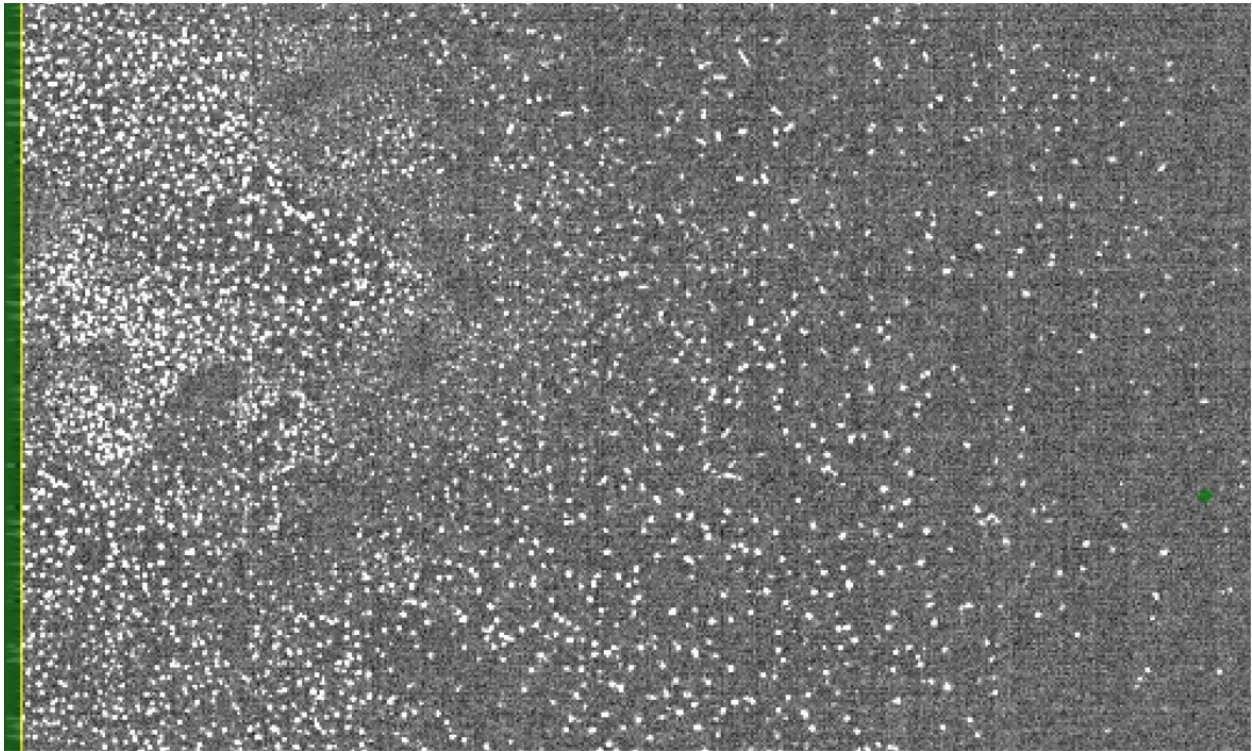


FIGURE 6: A full-resolution view of the edge of R22\_S01. The features shown in this image are point-like sources caused by the trapped phosphorescence photo-resist.

of an issue on the full camera.

## 10.2 Vampire pixels

There are defects on LSSTComCam that have been classified as “vampire” pixels, as they appear as a bright defect with a (generally) axisymmetric region surrounding the bright core, as if the defect is draining charge from its neighbors. The naming is at least broadly correct, as integrating to large radii shows that these regions do appear to conserve charge. There is an intensity dependence that makes these vampire pixels different than standard hot pixels, as these pixels do not show up on dark frames, only on flats and science exposures, where the detector surface is illuminated. After the initial discovery of the bright obvious vampires, we added new masking code that identifies the bright cores that are above 2.0 on the combined flat (pixels that are greater than 200% of the median flat level), and adds circular masks to the defect list. This appears to find the most problematic examples, but as we have improved flat quality during commissioning, we are finding that there is a sub-population that are not as severe, but likely have a similar physical mechanism. This population is still bright on the flat, with peaks around 1.2 (20% elevated relative to the flat), and may need to be masked as well. From an initial study in the lab, it appears that all ITL detectors on LSSTCam have a few of these kinds of defects, with two detectors approaching similar contamination levels as R22\_S10 on LSSTComCam.

## 10.3 Saturated star effects

Although we expected to find saturated star trails coming from bright sources, the observed behavior of these trails is unique. Saturation spikes on most cameras appear as streaks extending from the core of the bright source along the direction of the parallel transfers, and truncate as the charge bleeds run out of charge (and can no longer overcome the potentials defining the pixel). The trails seem with LSSTComCam, however, extend the entire height of the detectors, crossing the midline break. These trails are also not at the expected high state, with the centers of these trails having flux levels lower than the average sky levels, creating dark trails. On the worst saturated objects, there is also evidence of charge pile-up near the serial readout, which can then create fan-like bright features at the edge of the detector. Those bright features can also then crosstalk onto other amplifiers.

The underlying physics is not well understood, and further study will be needed to see if we

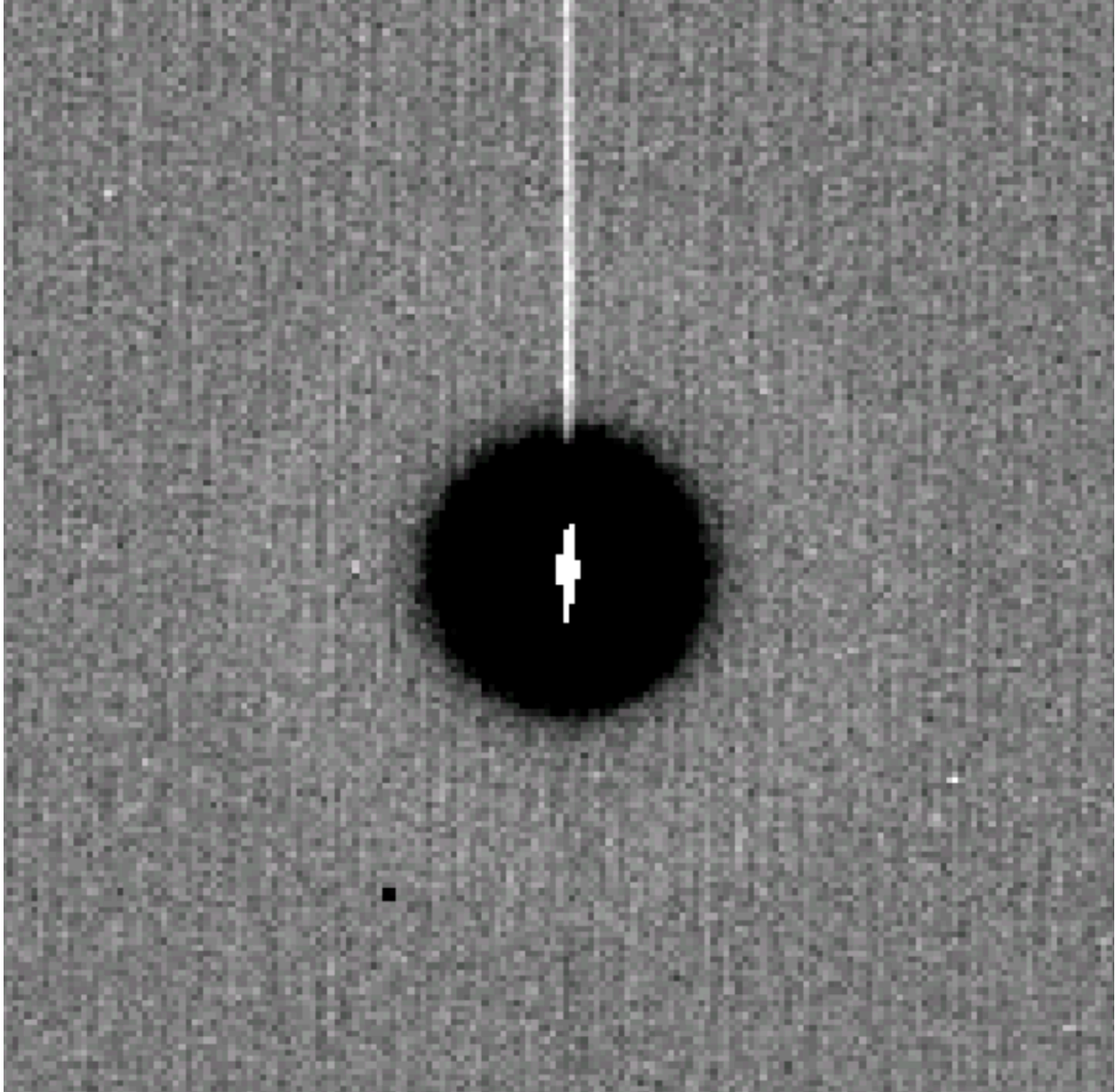


FIGURE 7: A close up of one of the largest vampire pixels. The bright core and region of depletion are clearly visible. Currently we only mask the core and depleted region, but will be extending this to mask the persistence-like trail that this feature leaves in the next few weeks.



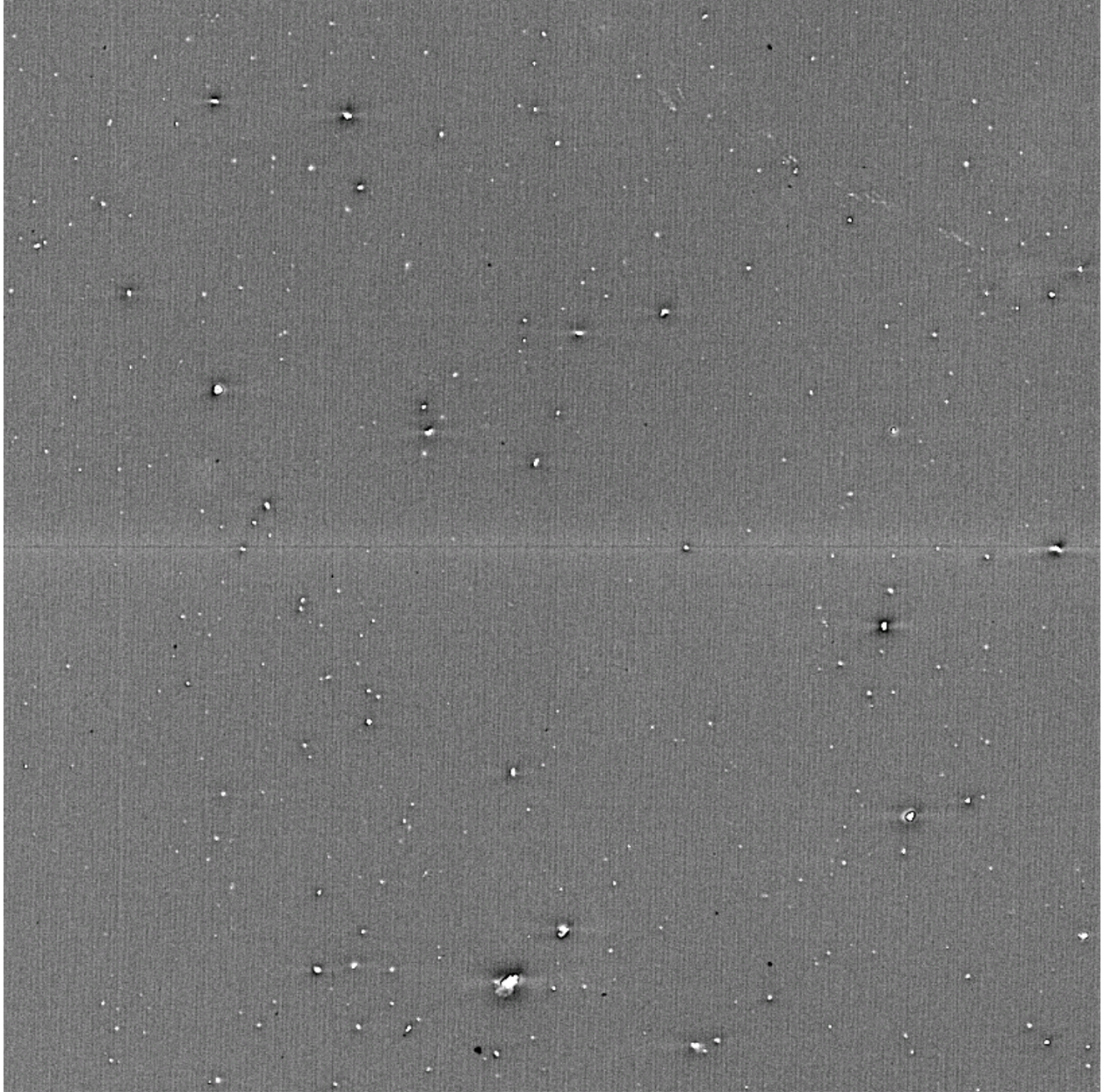


FIGURE 8: A view of detector R22\_S10 in y-band, which has a large number of less significant vampire pixels.

can correct these trails outside of the regions of charge buildup. Until we have a correction, we plan to begin masking both the trail and the fan-spread near the serial register.

Although we haven't seen identical features on LATISS, the presence of these odd trails on all LSSTComCam detectors suggests that this is a property of the ITL devices, and so will likely be seen on LSSTCam as well.

## 10.4 Gain ratios

LSSTComCam has been the first large-scale application of the updated "IsrTaskLSST" task, which uses a model of how the various signals combine to form the raw images to inform how we correct those signals during the ISR process. One improvement of this new task is that we now apply per-amplifier gains before flat correction, removing the gain component that was previously included in the flat correction. This results in the flat containing mainly QE and illumination patterns, which is much "flatter" than flats that also include gain terms (which offset the amplifiers relative to each other).

If we have properly diagonalized the flats and the gains, we would expect that applying the gain correction would create images with consistent sky levels across different amplifiers. However, when we look at images taken on-sky, our initial gain values result in some amplifiers being significantly different than their neighbors. The gains that we use are derived from the photon transfer curve (PTC), which uses flat pairs at different flux levels to monitor the properties of the noise. We have two of these sequences taken in the lab, and they disagree at the few percent level. This is similar in scale to the errors necessary to explain the on-sky differences. Further complicating this issue, the offsets seen in twilight data (used for flats) and that seen during the night also seem to differ. These differences so far have not been found to correlate with any device temperature, time, or voltage values. The gain correction fix appears to be stable, as we've only needed to generate and apply it once.

## 10.5 Crosstalk

We are currently using crosstalk values that were constructed by averaging the lab-based ITL measurements taken on LSSTCam. These are working better than expected, with residuals post correction being only a few electrons peak to peak. We plan to do a more complete crosstalk study using on-sky data, but the current results suggest that these lab measure-

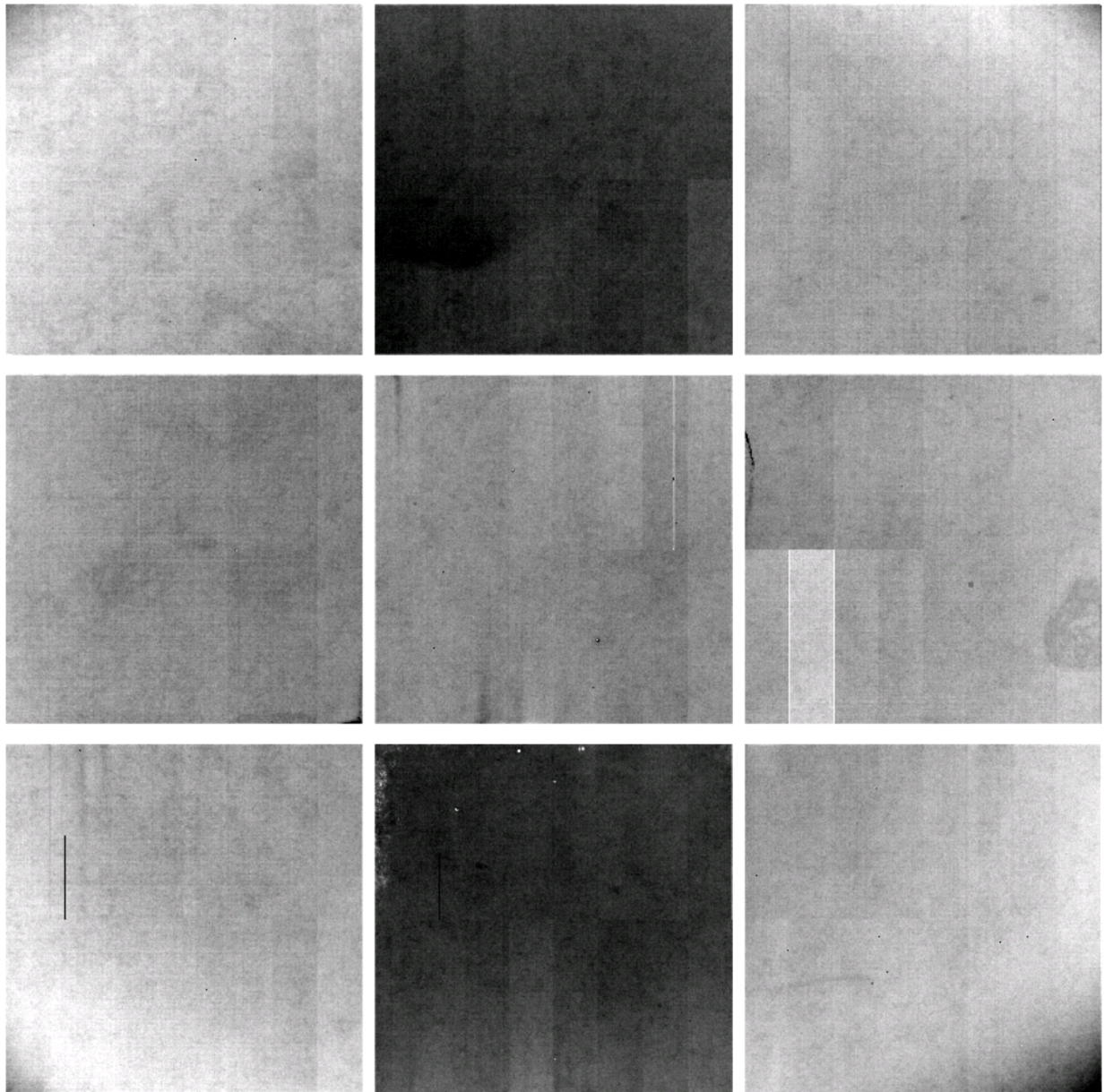


FIGURE 9: The ratio of the twilight-flat divided by a flat constructed from 94 r-band science frames. The scaling ranges from 0.9905 to 1.007. The visibility of amplifiers is caused by the unknown gain errors. The bottom right corner amplifier (C07) on R22\_S21 is one of the indicator amplifiers, as it diverges from its neighbors. Although the C00-C03 amplifiers in R22\_S12 also show significant offsets, these amplifiers also have an unrelated CTI issue, making them less reliable indicators.

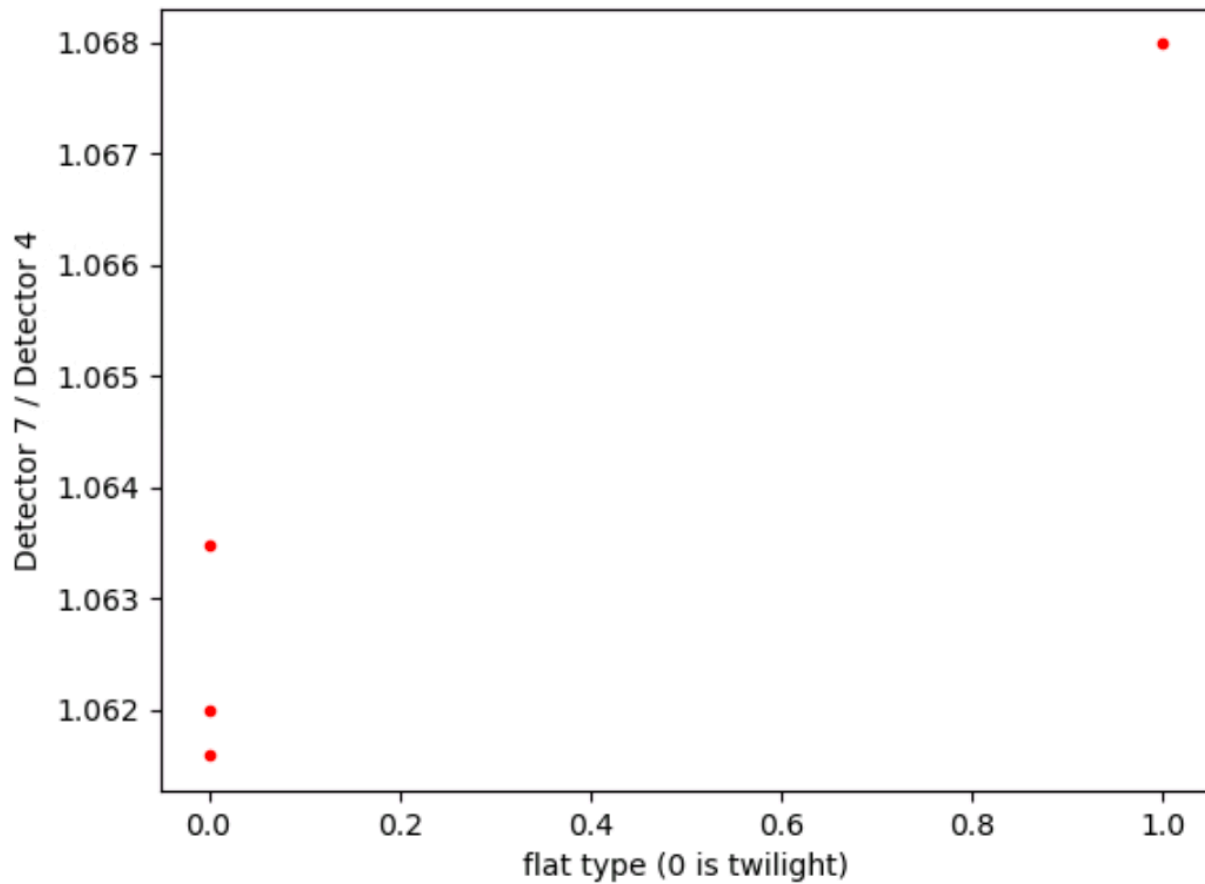


FIGURE 10: A comparison of the gain ratio between amplifiers in R22\_S12. C07 is chosen as the indicator amplifier, and C04 is the reference. We have three twilight flat measurements taken at different rotator angles, and one from the 94 input sky flat.

ments are sufficient for LSSTComCam, and expect the same to be true for LSSTCam.

## 10.6 Twilight flats

There is no flat screen currently available for the main telescope, and so we have constructed twilight flats for all bands using exposures taken to have median counts between 15000-20000 ADU. We have some dithering in the inputs, which have allowed us to reduce the impact of stars that print through into the flat. This reduction of non-sky signals is imperfect, and the current i-band flat shows a satellite trail as a result. We are working to replace this flat using newly taken data.

## 10.7 Operations

The Telescope and Auxiliary Instrumentation Calibration Acceptance Board (TAXICAB) has been meeting previously to discuss LATISS calibrations, and has been helping manage calibrations for LSSTComCam. This process has not prevented problematic calibrations from being deployed (like the i-band flat with the satellite trail), but it has ensured that multiple people have checked some set of results. We are generating calibration verification reports regularly as part of this process (available at [https://s3df.s1ac.stanford.edu/people/czw/cpv\\_reports/](https://s3df.s1ac.stanford.edu/people/czw/cpv_reports/)), and plan to add new metrics and checks to these as we discover more features of these detectors.

## 11 Low Surface Brightness

## 12 Astrometric Calibration

## 13 Photometric Calibration

## 14 Survey Performance

## 15 Sample Production

## 16 Difference Image Analysis: Transience and Variable Objects

## 17 Difference Image Analysis: Solar System Objects

## 18 Galaxy Photometry

## 19 Weak Lensing Shear

## 20 Crowded Stellar Fields

## 21 Image Inspection

## A References

**[SITCOMTN-076]**, Bechtol, K., on behalf of the Rubin Observatory Project Science Team, S.R., 2024, Information Sharing during Commissioning, URL <https://sitcomtn-076.lsst.io/>, Vera C. Rubin Observatory Commissioning Technical Note SITCOMTN-076

**[LSE-29]**, Claver, C.F., The LSST Systems Engineering Integrated Project Team, 2017, LSST System Requirements (LSR), URL <https://ls.st/LSE-29>, Vera C. Rubin Observatory LSE-29

**[LSE-30]**, Claver, C.F., The LSST Systems Engineering Integrated Project Team, 2018, Observatory System Specifications (OSS), URL <https://ls.st/LSE-30>, Vera C. Rubin Observatory LSE-30

**[RTN-011]**, Guy, L.P., Bechtol, K., Bellm, E., et al., 2024, Rubin Observatory Plans for an Early Science Program, URL <https://rtn-011.lsst.io/>, Vera C. Rubin Observatory Technical Note RTN-011

## B Acronyms

Acronym	Description
ADU	Analogue-to-Digital Unit
AOS	Active Optics System
CCD	Charge-Coupled Device
DES	Dark Energy Survey
DM	Data Management
DRP	Data Release Production
FWHM	Full Width at Half-Maximum
ISR	Instrument Signal Removal
ITL	Imaging Technology Laboratory (UA)
LATISS	LSST Atmospheric Transmission Imager and Slitless Spectrograph
LSST	Legacy Survey of Space and Time (formerly Large Synoptic Survey Telescope)
PSF	Point Spread Function
QE	quantum efficiency
RTN	Rubin Technical Note
SE	System Engineering