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Strzys, M.C.; Abe, S.; de Bony de Lavergne, M.; Hütten, M.; Mender, S.; Vovk, I.; CTA consortium; CTA-LST project

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Pybkgmodel - a background modelling toolbox for the CTA

Marcel C. Strzys,[a,*] Shotaro Abe,[a] Mathieu de Bony de Lavergne,[b] Moritz Hütten,[a] Simone Mender[c] and Ievgen Vovk[a] on behalf of the CTA consortium and the CTA-LST project.

[a] *Institute for Cosmic Ray Research (ICRR), The University of Tokyo*
5-1-5 Kashiwanoha, Kashiwa, Chiba, 277-8582, Japan
[b] *IRFU, CEA, Université Paris-Saclay,*
Bât. 141 CEA-Saclay, 91191 Gif-sur-Yvette, France
[c] *TU Dortmund University, Department of Physics,*
Otto-Hahn-Str. 4, 44227 Dortmund, Germany

E-mail: strzys@icrr.u-tokyo.ac.jp, vovk@icrr.u-tokyo.ac.jp

Despite the advancement in background rejection techniques, observation of the very-high-energy gamma-ray sky by imaging atmospheric Cherenkov telescopes (IACTs) are subject to an irreducible background from gamma-like hadron- or electron-induced air showers. The determination of this residual background is crucial for accurate spectral and spatial measurements.
The Cherenkov Telescope Array (CTA) will become the next generation of IACTs. To unveil its full potential, the improved reconstruction performance of CTA needs to be coupled with a reliable background estimate across the entire field of view. This may become especially important in the case of the planned surveys of large areas of the sky.
In this contribution we will present pybkgmodel, an open-source python software package developed for CTA. It aims at providing in a consistent way the various background modelling methods, based on the experience from current IACTs such as H.E.S.S, MAGIC, and VERITAS. It is designed as a toolbox allowing a user to easily choose the optimal reconstruction approach for various target regions or a combination of several algorithms. We will introduce the design of the package as well as demonstrate its functionality using data for the CTA Large-Sized Telescope prototype (LST-1).

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1. Introduction

Imaging Air Cherenkov Telescopes (IACTs) observe the high-energy γ-ray universe by detecting the flashes of Cherenkov light resulting from extensive air shower (EAS) induced by the cosmic γ-rays in the atmosphere. Thus, these kinds of telescopes are subject to a high background of EAS induced by cosmic rays (CRs). In recent decades, the advancement in machine learning techniques in combination with the usage of Cherenkov stereo systems has greatly reduced this background, still the non-negligible γ-like CR induced events pass the event selection criteria. Most of these events contain one or several π^0 sub-cascade early on in their development [1–3]. The irreducible background events are distributed throughout the field of view (FoV) and the distribution approximately follows the camera response to an isotropic flux. The camera acceptance for hadronic showers only agrees to a certain extent with the one for gamma-ray showers. The shape and intensity of the distribution depends on the observational conditions (e.g. weather, pointing position of the telescope). Hence, the background level has to be determined either by measuring it or estimating it from Monte-Carlo event simulations. The latter approach is computationally heavy and subject to the larger uncertainties in the hadronic interaction models used for the hadronic EAS compared to electromagnetic showers [4].

Traditionally, data from IACTs are analysed using an "aperture photometry" like approach, where the signal is determined as the difference of event counts from the expected source location and one or several background control regions. The regions for the background determination are usually placed at a similar offset from the pointing position and have a similar extension as the source location, the so-called reflected regions method. This method however is not well suited to analyse extended sources, regions with overlapping emission regions, and sources with uncertain localisation, where an imaged-based analysis approach is preferable. Hence, in addition to the traditional approach, *Gammapy*[1], the science tool for the Cherenkov Telescope Array (CTA), provides routines such as a spatial likelihood fit of a spatial model to the data [5, 6]. This requires an accurate background model for the entire FoV of the instrument. As demonstrated by [7], the optimal method for the background determination will depend on the source and is usually a trade-off between statistical and systematic precision.

The CTA is the next generation of IACTs and currently under construction at La Palma, Spain, and Paranal, Chile. It is expected to observe and resolve a plethora of gamma-ray sources including scans over a large fraction of the sky, particularly the Galactic plane. Hence, a flexible and accurate background modelling will be crucial. CTA is already boosting the development of open-source software for IACTs and other gamma-ray instruments. This contribution will introduce the *pybkgmodel* toolbox aiming to provide several of the available background methods and supposed to fill the remaining gap in the high-level analysis chain.

2. The *pybkgmodel* package

pybkgmodel aims to provide methods for generating background models for gamma-ray instruments, predominantly for IACTs. Its output products are compatible with the data formats for

[1] https://gammapy.org/

Figure 1: Data levels of the CTA software ecosystem including a short description of their content.

gamma-ray astronomy (GADF)[2]. The software is publicly available at the CTA Observatory github repository[3] and published as open-source under the BSD3-Clause license. It is fully implemented in python and builds on the scientific python package in astronomy, mainly *astropy*[4] and *numpy*[5] [8, 9]. It can be easily installed via the python package manager *pip*.

It complements *pyirf*[6] [10], providing the instrument response functions (IRFs) and *Gammapy*, providing the high level analysis based on the data, IRFs, and background. A detailed example of the construction and validation of such a background model for *Gammapy* based on one method, the construction from source-free sky regions, is provided in [11] using the large dataset of the H.E.S.S. Galactic Plane survey.

pybkgmodel has a modular structure, which allows the user to change between different input formats and background reconstruction techniques. For the input format, *pybkgmodel* can process data after the event selection at, corresponding the data level 3 (DL3, see Figure 1), as well as before at DL2, since some background modelling techniques such as the template background depend on the event classification parameter [12]. The output can be either generated for each observation run separately (run-wise) or stacked across all runs. Following the concept of the GADF, the background is reconstructed and the output provided in the camera coordinate system. The package can be used as a ready-made program with the settings provided in a configuration file or the sub-modules can be integrated into a larger framework. The package consists of the following sub-modules:

`pybkgmodel.processing`: this sub-module provides the processing units, which store the input data, perform the steps to reconstruct the run-wise or stacked camera images.

`pybkgmodel.data`: this module provided the data readers and functionalities to identify the runs used for the background reconstruction. As of now it can process DL2 in *hdf5*, DL3 files in *fits* format, and for legacy purposes *ROOT* files, though additional file readers can easily be added.

`pybkgmodel.model`: contains the algorithms for generating the background models for each run. Currently it provides two reconstruction methods adopted from the SkyPrism package for the MAGIC telescopes, the wobble and the exclusion map [13]. The advantage of these methods is that they can construct a background model based on the source data alone given they were taken in the so-called wobble mode [14].

[2] https://gamma-astro-data-formats.readthedocs.io/
[3] https://github.com/cta-observatory/pybkgmodel
[4] http://www.astropy.org
[5] https://numpy.org/
[6] https://github.com/cta-observatory/pyirf

`pybkgmodel.camera` contains the camera geometry. At the moment only 3D Cartesian geometry of the GADF (x,y,energy) is supported. Since the GADF requires the background to be saved as a rate, the camera model stores the data in counts and observation time separately, so they can easily be stacked for the stacked output option.

3. Demonstration

This section shall demonstrate the functionality and output of *pybkgmodel*. For this demonstration, we use data taken by the Large-Sized Telescope prototype (LST-1)[7] on the Crab Nebula at large Zenith angles. Since 2019, LST has already accumulated over 40 h of high quality data on the Crab Nebula, using the wobble pointing scheme, which has been used to study the performance of LST-1 as reported in [15]. This allows for the testing and refining of CTA software packages including pybkgmodel.

In the following we use a Crab Nebula data sample of 11.1 h effective observation time taken by the LST-1 at $Zd > 56°$. The event selection cuts in the following examples are rather arbitrary as they are rather for illustrative purposes, but we used an cut on the Cherenkov light yield of each event of $Intensity > 200$ ph.e. and a gammaness survival efficiency for the gamma-hadron separation of above 80 %. Once the data are processed to DL2 or DL3, the user can run *pybkgmodel* using a configuration file in yaml format. In the file the user can define the directories for the input and output files, whether the output should be run-wise or stacked, and which background reconstruction algorithm should be used. Furthermore, it contains the selection parameter to identify the runs used to generate the background model for a target run as well as the spatial and energy binning for the camera maps, which will be filled with the background events.

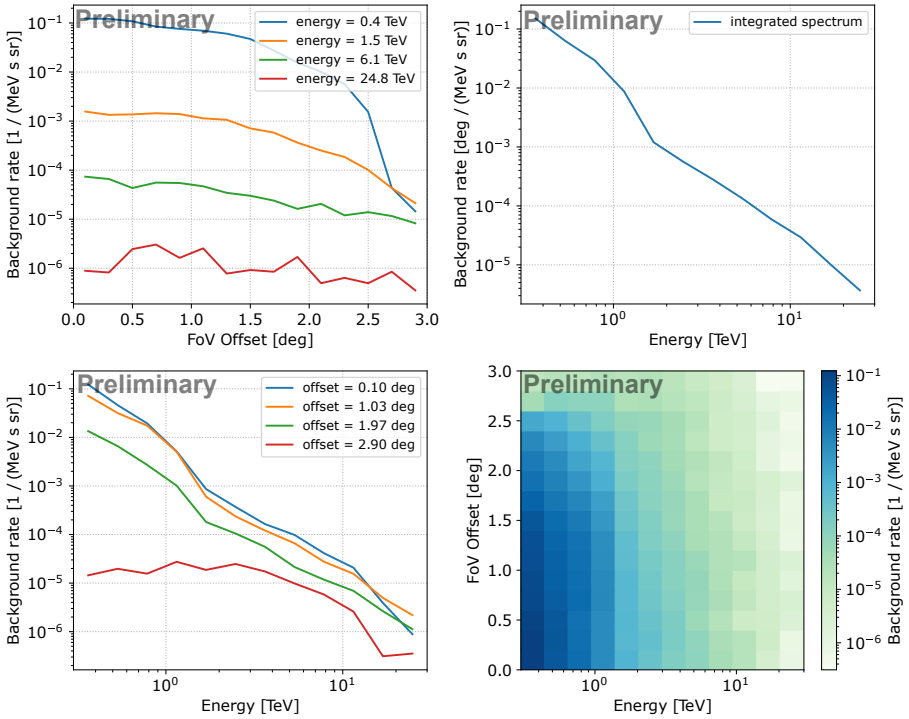
When the background model files are generated they can either be included as a HDU layer to the data file, or added to the runs within *Gammapy*. An example of a background model generated from several runs is displayed in Figure 2. For simplicity, the output is stacked in this example. The model is generated using the exclusion map method, so the entire camera is used for the background excluding a circle of 0.35° around the Crab Nebula. As required by the GADF and *Gammapy*, the background is provided as a rate per energy and solid-angle.

The following examples will use the same files and background method, but uses the run-wise maps added to the corresponding runs within *Gammapy*. Figure 3 shows the count map and the background fit to the data using the FoV background excluding the 0.35° region around Crab. The maps are binned into pixels of 0.02° and the maps are smoothed with a kernel of 0.04° for a better visual comparison between the maps. The maps indicate that the background indeed can be correctly reproduced in terms of shape across the FoV.

From the excess map and the background map, *Gammapy* can estimate an excess and significance map allowing for a more detailed assessment of the agreement between the background model and the diffuse background in the count map. Figure 4 displays the excess and significance map using a correlation radius estimating the counts of 0.06°, which is roughly the size of the points spread function of the LST. One can see that the background map does not produce any significant artefacts in FoV. It is confirmed by the significance distribution of pixels. If the background is well

[7] https://www.lst1.iac.es

Figure 2: Example of a background file obtained from several runs using a stacked exclusion map method and loaded into *Gammapy*.



described by the model, the distribution of the background pixels outside the source region (shown in purple in Fig. 4) is centred around zero with a width of $\sigma = 1$, which is almost the case here. Slight deviations are to be expected and can be caused by choice of event selection parameters and possible systematic uncertainties.

4. Summary and future extensions

While *pybkgmodel* is still in the early phase of its development, it is already fully functional for basic background model reconstruction and contains all the necessary base classes for further expansion. We consider adding additional background reconstruction methods such as the template background [12]. For cases of low statistics interpolation methods might be crucial, though they depend on approximate knowledge of the background shape. Moreover, an automatic benchmarking tool is being developed for the testing the different methods on different scenarios. [11] includes a description of a systematic validation approach.

As this code is mainly developed within the CTA community, the package is evolving with a focus on IACTs. However, the program might be useful for any instrument following the GADF principles. It complements the existing packages of *pyirf* and *Gammapy* and we aim to further develop it in this direction. We hope it becomes an established, community-driven package in the field helping users and the CTA observatory alike to overcome the challenge of constructing accurate background models.

Figure 3: Count map and corresponding background map generated with pybkgmodel and processed with *Gammapy*. The maps show the event and background maps stacked for all runs. For a better comparison, the central region in the count map containing the Crab Nebula is excluded. Both maps use a binning of 0.02° and are smoothed with a Gaussian kernel of 0.04° width. The smoothing is for visual reasons only and chosen to just reduce the noisiness in the count image, so that visual comparison is possible without affecting the structures in both images too much.

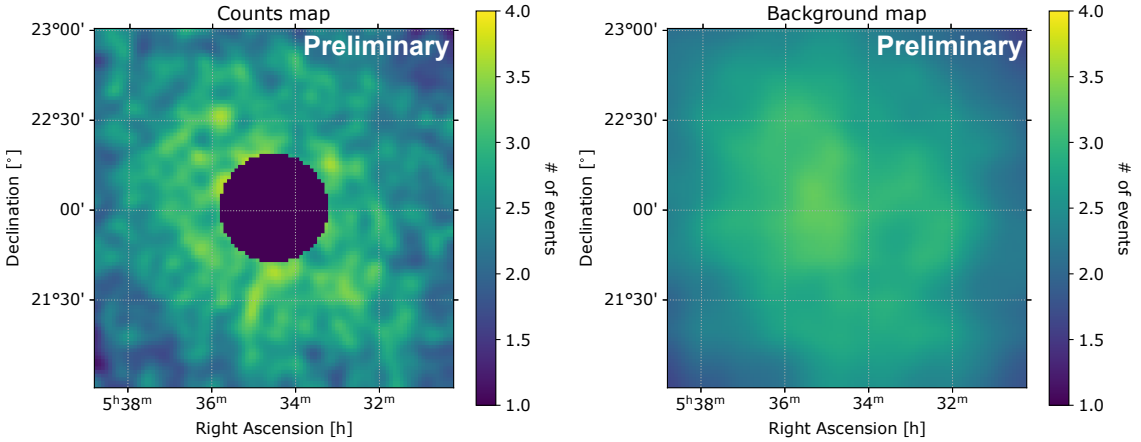
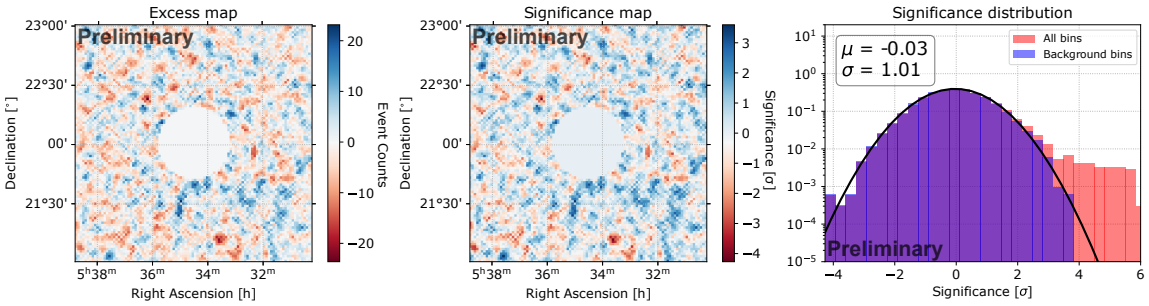


Figure 4: Excess event map, significance map in terms of sigma of a Gaussian, and significance distribution of the pixel values in the significance map. The Gaussian fit in the significance distribution is applied to the purple background bins only. The maps were generated with *Gammapy* based on the fitted background model.



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Full Author List: CTA-LST Project

K. Abe[1], S. Abe[2], A. Aguasca-Cabot[3], I. Agudo[4], N. Alvarez Crespo[5], L. A. Antonelli[6], C. Aramo[7], A. Arbet-Engels[8], C. Arcaro[9], M. Artero[10], K. Asano[2], P. Aubert[11], A. Baktash[12], A. Bamba[13], A. Baquero Larriva[5,14], L. Baroncelli[15], U. Barres de Almeida[16], J. A. Barrio[5], I. Batkovic[9], J. Baxter[2], J. Becerra González[17], E. Bernardini[9], M. I. Bernardos[4], J. Bernete Medrano[18], A. Berti[8], P. Bhattacharjee[11], N. Biederbeck[19], C. Bigongiari[6], E. Bissaldi[20], O. Blanch[10], G. Bonnoli[21], P. Bordas[3], A. Bulgarelli[15], I. Burelli[22], L. Burmistrov[23], M. Buscemi[24], M. Cardillo[25], S. Caroff[11], A. Carosi[6], M. S. Carrasco[26], F. Cassol[26], D. Cauz[22], D. Cerasole[27], G. Ceribella[8], Y. Chai[8], K. Cheng[2], A. Chiavassa[28], M. Chikawa[2], L. Chytka[29], A. Cifuentes[18], J. L. Contreras[5], J. Cortina[18], H. Costantini[26], M. Dalchenko[23], F. Dazzi[6], A. De Angelis[9], M. de Bony de Lavergne[11], B. De Lotto[22], M. De Lucia[7], R. de Menezes[28], L. Del Peral[30], G. Deleglise[11], C. Delgado[18], J. Delgado Mengual[31], D. della Volpe[23], M. Dellaiera[11], A. Di Piano[15], F. Di Pierro[28], A. Di Pilato[23], R. Di Tria[27], L. Di Venere[27], C. Díaz[18], R. M. Dominik[19], D. Dominis Prester[32], A. Donini[6], D. Dorner[33], M. Doro[9], L. Eisenberger[33], D. Elsässer[19], G. Emery[26], J. Escudero[4], V. Fallah Ramazani[34], G. Ferrara[24], F. Ferrarotto[35], A. Fiasson[11,36], L. Foffano[25], L. Freixas Coromina[18], S. Fröse[19], S. Fukami[2], Y. Fukazawa[37], E. Garcia[11], R. Garcia López[17], C. Gasbarra[38], D. Gasparrini[38], D. Geyer[19], J. Giesbrecht Paiva[16], N. Giglietto[20], F. Giordano[27], P. Gliwny[39], N. Godinovic[40], R. Grau[10], J. Green[8], D. Green[8], S. Gunji[41], P. Günther[33], J. Hackfeld[34], D. Hadasch[2], A. Hahn[8], K. Hashiyama[2], T. Hassan[18], K. Hayashi[2], L. Heckmann[8], M. Heller[23], J. Herrera Llorente[17], K. Hirotani[2], D. Hoffmann[26], D. Horns[12], J. Houles[26], M. Hrabovsky[29], D. Hrupec[42], D. Hui[2], M. Hütten[2], M. Iarlori[43], R. Imazawa[37], T. Inada[2], Y. Inome[2], K. Ioka[44], M. Iori[35], K. Ishio[39], I. Jimenez Martinez[18], J. Jurysek[45], M. Kagaya[2], V. Karas[46], H. Katagiri[47], J. Kataoka[48], D. Kerszberg[10], Y. Kobayashi[2], K. Kohri[49], A. Kong[2], H. Kubo[2], J. Kushida[1], M. Lainez[5], G. Lamanna[11], A. Lamastra[6], T. Le Flour[11], M. Linhoff[19], F. Longo[50], R. López-Coto[4], A. López-Oramas[17], S. Loporchio[27], A. Lorini[51], J. Lozano Bahilo[30], P. L. Luque-Escamilla[52], P. Majumdar[53,2], M. Makariev[54], D. Mandat[45], M. Manganaro[32], G. Manicò[24], K. Mannheim[33], M. Mariotti[9], P. Marquez[10], G. Marsella[24,55], J. Marti[52], O. Martinez[56], G. Martínez[18], M. Martínez[10], A. Mas-Aguilar[5], G. Maurin[11], D. Mazin[2,8], E. Mestre Guillen[52], S. Micanovic[32], D. Miceli[9], T. Miener[5], J. M. Miranda[56], R. Mirzoyan[8], T. Mizuno[57], M. Molero Gonzalez[17], E. Molina[3], T. Montaruli[23], I. Monteiro[11], A. Moralejo[10], D. Morcuende[5], A. Morselli[38], V. Moya[5], H. Muraishi[58], K. Murase[2], S. Nagataki[59], T. Nakamori[41], A. Neronov[60], L. Nickel[19], M. Nievas Rosillo[17], K. Nishijima[1], K. Noda[2], D. Nosek[61], S. Nozaki[8], M. Ohishi[2], Y. Ohtani[2], T. Oka[62], A. Okumura[63,64], R. Orito[65], J. Otero-Santos[17], M. Palatiello[22], D. Paneque[8], F. R. Pantaleo[20], R. Paoletti[51], J. M. Paredes[3], M. Pech[45,29], M. Pecimotika[32], M. Peresano[28], F. Pfeiffle[33], E. Pietropaolo[66], G. Pirola[8], C. Plard[11], F. Podobnik[51], V. Poireau[11], M. Polo[18], E. Pons[11], E. Prandini[9], J. Prast[11], G. Principe[50], C. Priyadarshi[10], M. Prouza[45], R. Rando[9], W. Rhode[19], M. Ribó[3], C. Righi[21], V. Rizi[66], G. Rodriguez Fernandez[38], M. D. Rodríguez Frías[30], T. Saito[2], S. Sakurai[2], D. A. Sanchez[11], T. Šarić[40], Y. Sato[67], F. G. Saturni[6], V. Savchenko[60], B. Schleicher[33], F. Schmuckermaier[8], J. L. Schubert[19], F. Schussler[68], T. Schweizer[8], M. Seglar Arroyo[11], T. Siegert[33], R. Silvia[27], J. Sitarek[39], V. Sliusar[69], A. Spolon[9], J. Strišković[42], M. Strzys[2], Y. Suda[37], H. Tajima[63], M. Takahashi[63], H. Takahashi[37], J. Takata[2], R. Takeishi[2], P. H. T. Tam[2], S. J. Tanaka[67], D. Tateishi[70], P. Temnikov[54], Y. Terada[70], K. Terauchi[62], T. Terzic[32], M. Teshima[8,2], M. Tluczykont[12], F. Tokanai[41], D. F. Torres[71], P. Travnicek[45], S. Truzzi[51], A. Tutone[6], M. Vacula[29], P. Vallania[28], J. van Scherpenberg[8], M. Vázquez Acosta[17], I. Viale[9], A. Vigliano[22], C. F. Vigorito[28,72], V. Vitale[38], G. Voutsinas[23], I. Vovk[2], T. Vuillaume[11], R. Walter[69], Z. Wei[71], M. Will[8], T. Yamamoto[73], R. Yamazaki[67], T. Yoshida[47], T. Yoshikoshi[2], N. Zywucka[39]

[1]Department of Physics, Tokai University. [2]Institute for Cosmic Ray Research, University of Tokyo. [3]Departament de Física Quàntica i Astrofísica, Institut de Ciències del Cosmos, Universitat de Barcelona, IEEC-UB. [4]Instituto de Astrofísica de Andalucía-CSIC. [5]EMFTEL department and IPARCOS, Universidad Complutense de Madrid. [6]INAF - Osservatorio Astronomico di Roma. [7]INFN Sezione di Napoli. [8]Max-Planck-Institut für Physik. [9]INFN Sezione di Padova and Università degli Studi di Padova. [10]Institut de Fisica d'Altes Energies (IFAE), The Barcelona Institute of Science and Technology. [11]LAPP, Univ. Grenoble Alpes, Univ. Savoie Mont Blanc, CNRS-IN2P3, Annecy. [12]Universität Hamburg, Institut für Experimentalphysik. [13]Graduate School of Science, University of Tokyo. [14]Universidad del Azuay. [15]INAF - Osservatorio di Astrofisica e Scienza dello spazio di Bologna. [16]Centro Brasileiro de Pesquisas Físicas. [17]Instituto de Astrofísica de Canarias and Departamento de Astrofísica, Universidad de La Laguna. [18]CIEMAT. [19]Department of Physics, TU Dortmund University. [20]INFN Sezione di Bari and Politecnico di Bari. [21]INAF - Osservatorio Astronomico di Brera. [22]INFN Sezione di Trieste and Università degli Studi di Udine. [23]University of Geneva - Département de physique nucléaire et corpusculaire. [24]INFN Sezione di Catania. [25]INAF - Istituto di Astrofisica e Planetologia Spaziali (IAPS). [26]Aix Marseille Univ, CNRS/IN2P3, CPPM. [27]INFN Sezione di Bari and Università di Bari. [28]INFN Sezione di Torino. [29]Palacky University Olomouc, Faculty of Science. [30]University of Alcalá UAH. [31]Port d'Informació Científica. [32]University of Rijeka, Department of Physics. [33]Institute for Theoretical Physics and Astrophysics, Universität Würzburg. [34]Institut für Theoretische Physik, Lehrstuhl IV: Plasma-Astroteilchenphysik, Ruhr-Universität Bochum. [35]INFN Sezione di Roma La Sapienza. [36]ILANCE, CNRS . [37]Physics Program, Graduate School of Advanced Science and Engineering, Hiroshima University. [38]INFN Sezione di Roma Tor Vergata. [39]Faculty of Physics and Applied Informatics, University of Lodz. [40]University of Split, FESB. [41]Department of Physics, Yamagata University. [42]Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Department of Physics. [43]INFN Dipartimento di Scienze Fisiche e Chimiche - Università degli Studi dell'Aquila and Gran Sasso Science Institute. [44]Yukawa Institute for Theoretical Physics, Kyoto University. [45]FZU - Institute of Physics of the Czech Academy of Sciences. [46]Astronomical Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences. [47]Faculty of Science, Ibaraki University. [48]Faculty of Science and Engineering, Waseda University. [49]Institute of Particle and Nuclear Studies, KEK (High Energy Accelerator Research Organization). [50]INFN Sezione di Trieste and Università degli Studi di Trieste. [51]INFN and Università degli Studi di Siena, Dipartimento di Scienze Fisiche, della Terra e dell'Ambiente (DSFTA). [52]Escuela Politécnica Superior de Jaén, Universidad de Jaén. [53]Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics. [54]Institute for Nuclear Research and Nuclear Energy, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. [55]Dipartimento di Fisica e Chimica 'E. Segrè' Università degli Studi di Palermo. [56]Grupo de Electronica, Universidad Complutense de Madrid. [57]Hiroshima Astrophysical Science Center, Hiroshima University. [58]School of Allied Health Sciences, Kitasato University. [59]RIKEN, Institute of Physical and Chemical Research. [60]Laboratory for High Energy Physics, École Polytechnique Fédérale. [61]Charles University, Institute of Particle and Nuclear Physics. [62]Division of Physics and Astronomy, Graduate School of Science, Kyoto University. [63]Institute for Space-Earth Environmental Research, Nagoya University. [64]Kobayashi-Maskawa Institute (KMI) for the Origin of Particles and the Universe, Nagoya University. [65]Graduate School of Technology, Industrial and Social Sciences, Tokushima University. [66]INFN Dipartimento di Scienze Fisiche e Chimiche - Università degli Studi dell'Aquila and Gran Sasso Science Institute. [67]Department of Physical Sciences, Aoyama Gakuin University. [68]IRFU, CEA, Université Paris-Saclay. [69]Department of Astronomy, University of Geneva. [70]Graduate School of Science and Engineering, Saitama University. [71]Institute of Space Sciences (ICE-CSIC), and Institut d'Estudis Espacials de Catalunya (IEEC), and Institució Catalana de Recerca I Estudis Avançats (ICREA). [72]Dipartimento di Fisica - Universitá degli Studi di Torino. [73]Department of Physics, Konan University.

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The CTA Consortium

K. Abe[1], S. Abe[2], A. Acharyya[3], R. Adam[4,5], A. Aguasca-Cabot[6], I. Agudo[7], J. Alfaro[8], N. Alvarez-Crespo[9], R. Alves Batista[10], J.-P. Amans[11], E. Amato[12], F. Ambrosino[13], E. O. Angüner[14], L. A. Antonelli[13], C. Aramo[15], C. Arcaro[16], L. Arrabito[17], K. Asano[2], J. Aschersleben[18], H. Ashkar[5], L. Augusto Stuani[19], D. Baack[20], M. Backes[21,22], C. Balazs[23], M. Balbo[24], A. Baquero Larriva[9,25], V. Barbosa Martins[26], U. Barres de Almeida[27,28], J. A. Barrio[9], D. Bastieri[29], P. I. Batista[26], I. Batkovic[29], R. Batzofin[30], J. Baxter[2], G. Beck[31], J. Becker Tjus[32], L. Beiske[20], D. Belardinelli[33], W. Benbow[34], E. Bernardini[29], J. Bernete Medrano[35], K. Bernlöhr[36], A. Berti[37], V. Beshley[38], P. Bhattacharjee[39], S. Bhattacharyya[40], B. Bi[41], N. Biederbeck[20], A. Biland[42], E. Bissaldi[43,44], O. Blanch[45], J. Blazek[46], C. Boisson[11], J. Bolmont[47], G. Bonnoli[48,49], P. Bordas[6], Z. Bosnjak[50], F. Bradascio[51], C. Braiding[52], E. Bronzini[53], R. Brose[54], A. M. Brown[55], F. Brun[51], G. Brunelli[53,7], A. Bulgarelli[53], I. Burelli[56], L. Burmistrov[57], M. Burton[58,59], T. Bylund[60], P. G. Calisse[61], A. Campoy-Ordaz[62], B. K. Cantlay[63,64], M. Capalbi[65], A. Caproni[66], R. Capuzzo-Dolcetta[13], C. Carlile[67], S. Caroff[39], A. Carosi[13], R. Carosi[49], M.-S. Carrasco[68], E. Cascone[69], F. Cassol[68], N. Castrejon[70], F. Catalani[71], D. Cerasole[72], M. Cerruti[73], S. Chaty[73], A. W. Chen[31], M. Chernyakova[74], A. Chiavassa[75,76], J. Chudoba[46], C. H. Coimbra Araujo[77], V. Conforti[53], F. Conte[36], J. L. Contreras[9], C. Cossou[60], A. Costa[78], H. Costantini[68], P. Cristofari[11], O. Cuevas[79], Z. Curtis-Ginsberg[80], G. D'Amico[81], F. D'Ammando[82], M. Dadina[53], M. Dalchenko[57], L. David[26], I. D. Davids[21], F. Dazzi[83], A. De Angelis[29], M. de Bony de Lavergne[60], V. De Caprio[69], G. De Cesare[53], E. M. de Gouveia Dal Pino[28], B. De Lotto[56], M. De Lucia[15], R. de Menezes[75,76], M. de Naurois[5], E. de Ona Wilhelmi[26], N. De Simone[26], V. de Souza[19], L. del Peral[70], M. V. del Valle[28], E. Delagnes[84], A. G. Delgado Giler[19,18], C. Delgado[35], M. Dell'aiera[39], R. Della Ceca[48], M. Della Valle[69], D. della Volpe[57], D. Depaoli[36], A. Dettlaff[37], T. Di Girolamo[85,15], A. Di Piano[53], F. Di Pierro[75], R. Di Tria[72], L. Di Venere[44], C. Díaz-Bahamondes[8], C. Dib[86], S. Diebold[41], R. Dima[29], A. Dinesh[9], A. Djannati-Ataï[73], J. Djuvsland[81], A. Domínguez[9], R. M. Dominik[20], A. Donini[13], D. Dorner[87,42], J. Dörner[32], M. Doro[29], R. D. C. dos Anjos[77], J.-L. Dournaux[11], D. Dravins[67], C. Duangchan[88,64], C. Dubos[89], L. Ducci[41], V. V. Dwarkadas[90], J. Ebr[46], C. Eckner[39,91], K. Egberts[30], S. Einecke[52], D. Elsässer[20], G. Emery[68], M. Escobar Godoy[92], J. Escudero[7], P. Esposito[93,94], D. Falceta-Goncalves[95], V. Fallah Ramazani[32], A. Faure[17], E. Fedorova[13,96], S. Fegan[5], K. Feijen[73], Q. Feng[34], G. Ferrand[97,98], F. Ferrarotto[99], E. Fiandrini[100], A. Fiasson[39], V. Fioretti[53], L. Foffano[101], L. Font Guiteras[62], G. Fontaine[5], S. Fröse[20], S. Fukami[42], Y. Fukui[102], S. Funk[88], D. Gaggero[49], G. Galanti[94], G. Galaz[8], Y. A. Gallant[17], S. Gallozzi[13], V. Gammaldi[10], C. Gasbarra[33], M. Gaug[62], A. Ghalumyan[103], F. Gianotti[53], M. Giarrusso[104], N. Giglietto[43,44], F. Giordano[72], A. Giuliani[94], J.-F. Glicenstein[51], J. Glombitza[88], P. Goldoni[105], J. M. González[106], M. M. González[107], J. Goulart Coelho[108], J. Granot[109,110], D. Grasso[49], R. Grau[45], D. Green[37], J. G. Green[37], T. Greenshaw[111], G. Grolleron[47], J. Grube[112], O. Gueta[26], S. Gunji[113], D. Hadasch[2], P. Hamal[46], W. Hanlon[34], S. Hara[114], V. M. Harvey[52], K. Hashiyama[2], T. Hassan[35], M. Heller[57], S. Hernández Cadena[107], J. Hie[115], N. Hiroshima[2], B. Hnatyk[96], R. Hnatyk[96], D. Hoffmann[68], W. Hofmann[36], M. Holler[116], D. Horan[5], P. Horvath[117], T. Hovatta[118], D. Hrupec[119], S. Hussain[28,120], M. Iarlori[121], T. Inada[2], F. Incardona[78], Y. Inome[2], S. Inoue[98], F. Iocco[85,15], K. Ishio[122], M. Jamrozy[123], P. Janecek[46], F. Jankowsky[124], C. Jarnot[115], P. Jean[115], I. Jiménez Martínez[35], W. Jin[3], L. Jocou[125], C. Juramy-Gilles[47], J. Jurysek[46], O. Kalekin[88], D. Kantzas[91], V. Karas[126], S. Kaufmann[55], D. Kerszberg[45], B. Khélifi[73], D. B. Kieda[127], T. Kleiner[26], W. Kluźniak[128], Y. Kobayashi[2], K. Kohri[129], N. Komin[31], P. Kornecki[11], K. Kosack[60], H. Kubo[2], J. Kushida[1], A. La Barbera[65], N. La Palombara[94], M. Láinez[9], A. Lamastra[13], J. Lapington[130], S. Lazarević[131], J. Lazendic-Galloway[23], S. Leach[130], M. Lemoine-Goumard[132], J.-P. Lenain[47], G. Leto[78], F. Leuschner[41], E. Lindfors[118], M. Linhoff[20], I. Liodakis[118], L. Loïc[51], S. Lombardi[13], F. Longo[133], R. López-Coto[7], M. López-Moya[9], A. López-Oramas[134], S. Loporchio[43,44], J. Lozano Bahilo[70], P. L. Luque-Escamilla[135], O. Macias[136], G. Maier[26], P. Majumdar[137], D. Malyshev[41], D. Malyshev[88], D. Mandat[46], G. Manicò[104,138], P. Marinos[52], S. Markoff[136], I. Márquez[7], P. Marquez[45], G. Marsella[139,104], J. Martí[135], P. Martin[115],

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G. A. Martínez[35], M. Martínez[45], O. Martinez[140,141], C. Marty[115], A. Mas-Aguilar[9], M. Mastropietro[13], G. Maurin[39], W. Max-Moerbeck[142], D. Mazin[2,37], D. Melkumyan[26], S. Menchiari[12,49], E. Mestre[143], J.-L. Meunier[47], D. M.-A. Meyer[30], D. Miceli[16], M. Michailidis[41], J. Michałowski[144], T. Miener[9], J. M. Miranda[140,145], A. Mitchell[88], M. Mizote[146], T. Mizuno[147], R. Moderski[128], L. Mohrmann[36], M. Molero[134], C. Molfese[83], E. Molina[134], T. Montaruli[57], A. Moralejo[45], D. Morcuende[9,7], K. Morik[20], A. Morselli[33], E. Moulin[51], V. Moya Zamanillo[9], R. Mukherjee[148], K. Munari[78], A. Muraczewski[128], H. Muraishi[149], T. Nakamori[113], L. Nava[48], A. Nayak[55], R. Nemmen[28,150], L. Nickel[20], J. Niemiec[144], D. Nieto[9], M. Nievas Rosillo[134], M. Nikołajuk[151], K. Nishijima[1], K. Noda[2], D. Nosek[152], B. Novosyadlyj[153], V. Novotny[152], S. Nozaki[37], P. O'Brien[130], M. Ohishi[2], Y. Ohtani[2], A. Okumura[154,155], J.-F. Olive[115], B. Olmi[156,12], R. A. Ong[157], M. Orienti[82], R. Orito[158], M. Orlandini[53], E. Orlando[133], M. Ostrowski[123], N. Otte[159], I. Oya[61], I. Pagano[78], A. Pagliaro[65], M. Palatiello[56], G. Panebianco[53], J. M. Paredes[6], N. Parmiggiani[53], S. R. Patel[89], B. Patricelli[13,160], D. Pavlović[161], A. Pe'er[37], M. Pech[46], M. Pecimotika[161,162], M. Peresano[76,75], J. Pérez-Romero[10,40], G. Peron[73], M. Persic[163,164], P.-O. Petrucci[125], O. Petruk[38], F. Pfeifle[87], F. Pintore[65], G. Pirola[37], C. Pittori[13], C. Plard[39], F. Podobnik[165], M. Pohl[30,26], E. Pons[39], E. Prandini[29], J. Prast[39], G. Principe[133], C. Priyadarshi[45], N. Produit[24], D. Prokhorov[136], E. Pueschel[26], G. Pühlhofer[41], M. L. Pumo[138,104], M. Punch[73], A. Quirrenbach[124], S. Rainò[72], N. Randazzo[104], R. Rando[29], T. Ravel[115], S. Razzaque[166,110], M. Regeard[73], P. Reichherzer[167,32], A. Reimer[116], O. Reimer[116], A. Reisenegger[8,168], T. Reposeur[132], B. Reville[36], W. Rhode[20], M. Ribó[6], T. Richtler[169], F. Rieger[36], E. Roache[34], G. Rodriguez Fernandez[33], M. D. Rodríguez Frías[70], J. J. Rodríguez-Vázquez[35], P. Romano[48], G. Romeo[78], J. Rosado[9], G. Rowell[52], B. Rudak[128], A. J. Ruiter[170], C. B. Rulten[55], F. Russo[53], I. Sadeh[26], L. Saha[34], T. Saito[2], S. Sakurai[2], H. Salzmann[41], D. Sanchez[39], M. Sánchez-Conde[10], P. Sangiorgi[65], H. Sano[2], M. Santander[3], A. Santangelo[41], R. Santos-Lima[28], A. Sanuy[6], T. Šarić[171], A. Sarkar[26], S. Sarkar[167], F. G. Saturni[13], V. Savchenko[172], A. Scherer[8], P. Schipani[69], B. Schleicher[87,42], P. Schovanek[46], J. L. Schubert[20], F. Schussler[51], U. Schwanke[173], G. Schwefer[36], S. Scuderi[94], M. Seglar Arroyo[45], I. Seitenzahl[170], O. Sergijenko[96,174,175], V. Sguera[53], R. Y. Shang[157], P. Sharma[89], G. D. S. SIDIBE[84], L. Sidoli[94], H. Siejkowski[176], C. Siqueira[19], P. Sizun[84], V. Sliusar[24], A. Slowikowska[177], H. Sol[11], A. Specovius[88], S. T. Spencer[88,167], D. Spiga[48], A. Stamerra[13,178], S. Stanič[40], T. Starecki[179], R. Starling[130], C. Steppa[30], T. Stolarczyk[60], J. Strišković[119], M. Strzys[2], Y. Suda[180], T. Suomijärvi[89], D. Tak[26], M. Takahashi[154], R. Takeishi[2], P.-H. T. Tam[2,181], S. J. Tanaka[182], T. Tanaka[146], K. Terauchi[183], V. Testa[13], L. Tibaldo[115], O. Tibolla[55], F. Torradeflot[184,35], D. F. Torres[143], E. Torresi[53], N. Tothill[131], F. Toussenel[47], V. Touzard[115], A. Tramacere[24], P. Travnicek[46], G. Tripodo[139,104], S. Truzzi[165], A. Tsiahina[115], A. Tutone[65], M. Vacula[117,46], B. Vallage[51], P. Vallania[75,185], R. Vallés[143], C. van Eldik[88], J. van Scherpenberg[37], J. Vandenbroucke[80], V. Vassiliev[157], P. Venault[84], S. Ventura[165], S. Vercellone[48], G. Verna[165], A. Viana[19], N. Viaux[186], A. Vigliano[56], J. Vignatti[86], C. F. Vigorito[75,76], V. Vitale[33], V. Vodeb[40], V. Voisin[47], S. Vorobiov[40], G. Voutsinas[57], I. Vovk[2], V. Waegebaert[115], S. J. Wagner[124], R. Walter[24], M. Ward[55], M. Wechakama[63,64], R. White[36], A. Wierzcholska[144], M. Will[37], D. A. Williams[92], F. Wohlleben[36], A. Wolter[48], T. Yamamoto[146], R. Yamazaki[182], L. Yang[166,181], T. Yoshida[187], T. Yoshikoshi[2], M. Zacharias[124,22], R. Zanmar Sanchez[78], D. Zavrtanik[40], M. Zavrtanik[40], A. A. Zdziarski[128], A. Zech[11], V. I. Zhdanov[96], K. Ziętara[123], M. Živec[40], J. Zuriaga-Puig[10]

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Affiliations

[1] Department of Physics, Tokai University, 4-1-1, Kita-Kaname, Hiratsuka, Kanagawa 259-1292, Japan

[2] Institute for Cosmic Ray Research, University of Tokyo, 5-1-5, Kashiwa-no-ha, Kashiwa, Chiba 277-8582, Japan

[3] University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Department of Physics and Astronomy, Gallalee Hall, Box 870324 Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0324, USA

[4] Université Côte d'Azur, Observatoire de la Côte d'Azur, CNRS, Laboratoire Lagrange, France

[5] Laboratoire Leprince-Ringuet, CNRS/IN2P3, École polytechnique, Institut Polytechnique de Paris, 91120 Palaiseau, France

[6] Departament de Física Quàntica i Astrofísica, Institut de Ciències del Cosmos, Universitat de Barcelona, IEEC-UB, Martí i Franquès, 1, 08028, Barcelona, Spain

[7] Instituto de Astrofísica de Andalucía-CSIC, Glorieta de la Astronomía s/n, 18008, Granada, Spain

[8] Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Av. Libertador Bernardo O'Higgins 340, Santiago, Chile

[9] IPARCOS-UCM, Instituto de Física de Partículas y del Cosmos, and EMFTEL Department, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, E-28040 Madrid, Spain

[10] Instituto de Física Teórica UAM/CSIC and Departamento de Física Teórica, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, c/ Nicolás Cabrera 13-15, Campus de Cantoblanco UAM, 28049 Madrid, Spain

[11] LUTH, GEPI and LERMA, Observatoire de Paris, Université PSL, Université Paris Cité, CNRS, 5 place Jules Janssen, 92190, Meudon, France

[12] INAF - Osservatorio Astrofisico di Arcetri, Largo E. Fermi, 5 - 50125 Firenze, Italy

[13] INAF - Osservatorio Astronomico di Roma, Via di Frascati 33, 00040, Monteporzio Catone, Italy

[14] TÜBİTAK Research Institute for Fundamental Sciences, 41470 Gebze, Kocaeli, Turkey

[15] INFN Sezione di Napoli, Via Cintia, ed. G, 80126 Napoli, Italy

[16] INFN Sezione di Padova, Via Marzolo 8, 35131 Padova, Italy

[17] Laboratoire Univers et Particules de Montpellier, Université de Montpellier, CNRS/IN2P3, CC 72, Place Eugène Bataillon, F-34095 Montpellier Cedex 5, France

[18] Kapteyn Astronomical Institute, University of Groningen, Landleven 12, 9747 AD, Groningen, The Netherlands

[19] Instituto de Física de São Carlos, Universidade de São Paulo, Av. Trabalhador São-carlense, 400 - CEP 13566-590, São Carlos, SP, Brazil

[20] Astroparticle Physics, Department of Physics, TU Dortmund University, Otto-Hahn-Str. 4a, 44227 Dortmund, Germany

[21] Department of Physics, Chemistry & Material Science, University of Namibia, Private Bag 13301, Windhoek, Namibia

[22] Centre for Space Research, North-West University, Potchefstroom, 2520, South Africa

[23] School of Physics and Astronomy, Monash University, Melbourne, Victoria 3800, Australia

[24] Department of Astronomy, University of Geneva, Chemin d'Ecogia 16, CH-1290 Versoix, Switzerland

[25] Faculty of Science and Technology, Universidad del Azuay, Cuenca, Ecuador.

[26] Deutsches Elektronen-Synchrotron, Platanenallee 6, 15738 Zeuthen, Germany

[27] Centro Brasileiro de Pesquisas Físicas, Rua Xavier Sigaud 150, RJ 22290-180, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

[28] Instituto de Astronomia, Geofísica e Ciências Atmosféricas - Universidade de São Paulo, Cidade Universitária, R. do Matão, 1226, CEP 05508-090, São Paulo, SP, Brazil

[29] INFN Sezione di Padova and Università degli Studi di Padova, Via Marzolo 8, 35131 Padova, Italy

[30] Institut für Physik & Astronomie, Universität Potsdam, Karl-Liebknecht-Strasse 24/25, 14476 Potsdam, Germany

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[31] University of the Witwatersrand, 1 Jan Smuts Avenue, Braamfontein, 2000 Johannesburg, South Africa

[32] Institut für Theoretische Physik, Lehrstuhl IV: Plasma-Astroteilchenphysik, Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Universitätsstraße 150, 44801 Bochum, Germany

[33] INFN Sezione di Roma Tor Vergata, Via della Ricerca Scientifica 1, 00133 Rome, Italy

[34] Center for Astrophysics | Harvard & Smithsonian, 60 Garden St, Cambridge, MA 02138, USA

[35] CIEMAT, Avda. Complutense 40, 28040 Madrid, Spain

[36] Max-Planck-Institut für Kernphysik, Saupfercheckweg 1, 69117 Heidelberg, Germany

[37] Max-Planck-Institut für Physik, Föhringer Ring 6, 80805 München, Germany

[38] Pidstryhach Institute for Applied Problems in Mechanics and Mathematics NASU, 3B Naukova Street, Lviv, 79060, Ukraine

[39] Univ. Savoie Mont Blanc, CNRS, Laboratoire d'Annecy de Physique des Particules - IN2P3, 74000 Annecy, France

[40] Center for Astrophysics and Cosmology (CAC), University of Nova Gorica, Nova Gorica, Slovenia

[41] Institut für Astronomie und Astrophysik, Universität Tübingen, Sand 1, 72076 Tübingen, Germany

[42] ETH Zürich, Institute for Particle Physics and Astrophysics, Otto-Stern-Weg 5, 8093 Zürich, Switzerland

[43] Politecnico di Bari, via Orabona 4, 70124 Bari, Italy

[44] INFN Sezione di Bari, via Orabona 4, 70126 Bari, Italy

[45] Institut de Fisica d'Altes Energies (IFAE), The Barcelona Institute of Science and Technology, Campus UAB, 08193 Bellaterra (Barcelona), Spain

[46] FZU - Institute of Physics of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Na Slovance 1999/2, 182 21 Praha 8, Czech Republic

[47] Sorbonne Université, CNRS/IN2P3, Laboratoire de Physique Nucléaire et de Hautes Energies, LPNHE, 4 place Jussieu, 75005 Paris, France

[48] INAF - Osservatorio Astronomico di Brera, Via Brera 28, 20121 Milano, Italy

[49] INFN Sezione di Pisa, Edificio C – Polo Fibonacci, Largo Bruno Pontecorvo 3, 56127 Pisa

[50] University of Zagreb, Faculty of electrical engineering and computing, Unska 3, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia

[51] IRFU, CEA, Université Paris-Saclay, Bât 141, 91191 Gif-sur-Yvette, France

[52] School of Physics, Chemistry and Earth Sciences, University of Adelaide, Adelaide SA 5005, Australia

[53] INAF - Osservatorio di Astrofisica e Scienza dello spazio di Bologna, Via Piero Gobetti 93/3, 40129 Bologna, Italy

[54] Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 31 Fitzwilliam Place, Dublin 2, Ireland

[55] Centre for Advanced Instrumentation, Department of Physics, Durham University, South Road, Durham, DH1 3LE, United Kingdom

[56] INFN Sezione di Trieste and Università degli Studi di Udine, Via delle Scienze 208, 33100 Udine, Italy

[57] University of Geneva - Département de physique nucléaire et corpusculaire, 24 rue du Général-Dufour, 1211 Genève 4, Switzerland

[58] Armagh Observatory and Planetarium, College Hill, Armagh BT61 9DG, United Kingdom

[59] School of Physics, University of New South Wales, Sydney NSW 2052, Australia

[60] Université Paris-Saclay, Université Paris Cité, CEA, CNRS, AIM, F-91191 Gif-sur-Yvette Cedex, France

[61] Cherenkov Telescope Array Observatory, Saupfercheckweg 1, 69117 Heidelberg, Germany

[62] Unitat de Física de les Radiacions, Departament de Física, and CERES-IEEC, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Edifici C3, Campus UAB, 08193 Bellaterra, Spain

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[63] Department of Physics, Faculty of Science, Kasetsart University, 50 Ngam Wong Wan Rd., Lat Yao, Chatuchak, Bangkok, 10900, Thailand

[64] National Astronomical Research Institute of Thailand, 191 Huay Kaew Rd., Suthep, Muang, Chiang Mai, 50200, Thailand

[65] INAF - Istituto di Astrofisica Spaziale e Fisica Cosmica di Palermo, Via U. La Malfa 153, 90146 Palermo, Italy

[66] Universidade Cruzeiro do Sul, Núcleo de Astrofísica Teórica (NAT/UCS), Rua Galvão Bueno 8687, Bloco B, sala 16, Libertade 01506-000 - São Paulo, Brazil

[67] Lund Observatory, Lund University, Box 43, SE-22100 Lund, Sweden

[68] Aix Marseille Univ, CNRS/IN2P3, CPPM, Marseille, France

[69] INAF - Osservatorio Astronomico di Capodimonte, Via Salita Moiariello 16, 80131 Napoli, Italy

[70] Universidad de Alcalá - Space & Astroparticle group, Facultad de Ciencias, Campus Universitario Ctra. Madrid-Barcelona, Km. 33.600 28871 Alcalá de Henares (Madrid), Spain

[71] Escola de Engenharia de Lorena, Universidade de São Paulo, Área I - Estrada Municipal do Campinho, s/n°, CEP 12602-810, Pte. Nova, Lorena, Brazil

[72] INFN Sezione di Bari and Università degli Studi di Bari, via Orabona 4, 70124 Bari, Italy

[73] Université Paris Cité, CNRS, Astroparticule et Cosmologie, F-75013 Paris, France

[74] Dublin City University, Glasnevin, Dublin 9, Ireland

[75] INFN Sezione di Torino, Via P. Giuria 1, 10125 Torino, Italy

[76] Dipartimento di Fisica - Università degli Studi di Torino, Via Pietro Giuria 1 - 10125 Torino, Italy

[77] Universidade Federal Do Paraná - Setor Palotina, Departamento de Engenharias e Exatas, Rua Pioneiro, 2153, Jardim Dallas, CEP: 85950-000 Palotina, Paraná, Brazil

[78] INAF - Osservatorio Astrofisico di Catania, Via S. Sofia, 78, 95123 Catania, Italy

[79] Universidad de Valparaíso, Blanco 951, Valparaiso, Chile

[80] University of Wisconsin, Madison, 500 Lincoln Drive, Madison, WI, 53706, USA

[81] Department of Physics and Technology, University of Bergen, Museplass 1, 5007 Bergen, Norway

[82] INAF - Istituto di Radioastronomia, Via Gobetti 101, 40129 Bologna, Italy

[83] INAF - Istituto Nazionale di Astrofisica, Viale del Parco Mellini 84, 00136 Rome, Italy

[84] IRFU/DEDIP, CEA, Université Paris-Saclay, Bat 141, 91191 Gif-sur-Yvette, France

[85] Universitá degli Studi di Napoli "Federico II" - Dipartimento di Fisica "E. Pancini", Complesso universitario di Monte Sant'Angelo, Via Cintia - 80126 Napoli, Italy

[86] CCTVal, Universidad Técnica Federico Santa María, Avenida España 1680, Valparaíso, Chile

[87] Institute for Theoretical Physics and Astrophysics, Universität Würzburg, Campus Hubland Nord, Emil-Fischer-Str. 31, 97074 Würzburg, Germany

[88] Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, Erlangen Centre for Astroparticle Physics, Nikolaus-Fiebiger-Str. 2, 91058 Erlangen, Germany

[89] Université Paris-Saclay, CNRS/IN2P3, IJCLab, 91405 Orsay, France

[90] Department of Astronomy and Astrophysics, University of Chicago, 5640 S Ellis Ave, Chicago, Illinois, 60637, USA

[91] LAPTh, CNRS, USMB, F-74940 Annecy, France

[92] Santa Cruz Institute for Particle Physics and Department of Physics, University of California, Santa Cruz, 1156 High Street, Santa Cruz, CA 95064, USA

[93] University School for Advanced Studies IUSS Pavia, Palazzo del Broletto, Piazza della Vittoria 15, 27100 Pavia, Italy

[94] INAF - Istituto di Astrofisica Spaziale e Fisica Cosmica di Milano, Via A. Corti 12, 20133 Milano, Italy

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[95] Escola de Artes, Ciências e Humanidades, Universidade de São Paulo, Rua Arlindo Bettio, CEP 03828-000, 1000 São Paulo, Brazil

[96] Astronomical Observatory of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, 3 Observatorna Street, Kyiv, 04053, Ukraine

[97] The University of Manitoba, Dept of Physics and Astronomy, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3T 2N2, Canada

[98] RIKEN, Institute of Physical and Chemical Research, 2-1 Hirosawa, Wako, Saitama, 351-0198, Japan

[99] INFN Sezione di Roma La Sapienza, P.le Aldo Moro, 2 - 00185 Roma, Italy

[100] INFN Sezione di Perugia and Università degli Studi di Perugia, Via A. Pascoli, 06123 Perugia, Italy

[101] INAF - Istituto di Astrofisica e Planetologia Spaziali (IAPS), Via del Fosso del Cavaliere 100, 00133 Roma, Italy

[102] Department of Physics, Nagoya University, Chikusa-ku, Nagoya, 464-8602, Japan

[103] Alikhanyan National Science Laboratory, Yerevan Physics Institute, 2 Alikhanyan Brothers St., 0036, Yerevan, Armenia

[104] INFN Sezione di Catania, Via S. Sofia 64, 95123 Catania, Italy

[105] Université Paris Cité, CNRS, CEA, Astroparticule et Cosmologie, F-75013 Paris, France

[106] Universidad Andres Bello, República 252, Santiago, Chile

[107] Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Delegación Coyoacán, 04510 Ciudad de México, Mexico

[108] Núcleo de Astrofísica e Cosmologia (Cosmo-ufes) & Departamento de Física, Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo (UFES), Av. Fernando Ferrari, 514. 29065-910. Vitória-ES, Brazil

[109] Astrophysics Research Center of the Open University (ARCO), The Open University of Israel, P.O. Box 808, Ra'anana 4353701, Israel

[110] Department of Physics, The George Washington University, Washington, DC 20052, USA

[111] University of Liverpool, Oliver Lodge Laboratory, Liverpool L69 7ZE, United Kingdom

[112] King's College London, Strand, London, WC2R 2LS, United Kingdom

[113] Department of Physics, Yamagata University, Yamagata, Yamagata 990-8560, Japan

[114] Learning and Education Development Center, Yamanashi-Gakuin University, Kofu, Yamanashi 400-8575, Japan

[115] IRAP, Université de Toulouse, CNRS, CNES, UPS, 9 avenue Colonel Roche, 31028 Toulouse, Cedex 4, France

[116] Universität Innsbruck, Institut für Astro- und Teilchenphysik, Technikerstr. 25/8, 6020 Innsbruck, Austria

[117] Palacký University Olomouc, Faculty of Science, Joint Laboratory of Optics of Palacký University and Institute of Physics of the Czech Academy of Sciences, 17. listopadu 1192/12, 779 00 Olomouc, Czech Republic

[118] Finnish Centre for Astronomy with ESO, University of Turku, Finland, FI-20014 University of Turku, Finland

[119] Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Trg Ljudevita Gaja 6, 31000 Osijek, Croatia

[120] Gran Sasso Science Institute (GSSI), Viale Francesco Crispi 7, 67100 L'Aquila, Italy and INFN-Laboratori Nazionali del Gran Sasso (LNGS), via G. Acitelli 22, 67100 Assergi (AQ), Italy

[121] Dipartimento di Scienze Fisiche e Chimiche, Università degli Studi dell'Aquila and GSGC-LNGS-INFN, Via Vetoio 1, L'Aquila, 67100, Italy

[122] Faculty of Physics and Applied Computer Science, University of Lódź, ul. Pomorska 149-153, 90-236 Lódź, Poland

[123] Astronomical Observatory, Jagiellonian University, ul. Orla 171, 30-244 Cracow, Poland

[124] Landessternwarte, Zentrum für Astronomie der Universität Heidelberg, Königstuhl 12, 69117 Heidelberg, Germany

[125] Univ. Grenoble Alpes, CNRS, IPAG, 414 rue de la Piscine, Domaine Universitaire, 38041 Grenoble Cedex 9, France

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[126] Astronomical Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Bocni II 1401 - 14100 Prague, Czech Republic

[127] Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT 84112-0830, USA

[128] Nicolaus Copernicus Astronomical Center, Polish Academy of Sciences, ul. Bartycka 18, 00-716 Warsaw, Poland

[129] Institute of Particle and Nuclear Studies, KEK (High Energy Accelerator Research Organization), 1-1 Oho, Tsukuba, 305-0801, Japan

[130] School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Leicester, Leicester, LE1 7RH, United Kingdom

[131] Western Sydney University, Locked Bag 1797, Penrith, NSW 2751, Australia

[132] Université Bordeaux, CNRS, LP2I Bordeaux, UMR 5797, 19 Chemin du Solarium, F-33170 Gradignan, France

[133] INFN Sezione di Trieste and Università degli Studi di Trieste, Via Valerio 2 I, 34127 Trieste, Italy

[134] Instituto de Astrofísica de Canarias and Departamento de Astrofísica, Universidad de La Laguna, La Laguna, Tenerife, Spain

[135] Escuela Politécnica Superior de Jaén, Universidad de Jaén, Campus Las Lagunillas s/n, Edif. A3, 23071 Jaén, Spain

[136] Anton Pannekoek Institute/GRAPPA, University of Amsterdam, Science Park 904 1098 XH Amsterdam, The Netherlands

[137] Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics, A CI of Homi Bhabha National Institute, Kolkata 700064, West Bengal, India

[138] Università degli studi di Catania, Dipartimento di Fisica e Astronomia "Ettore Majorana", Via S. Sofia 64, 95123 Catania, Italy

[139] Dipartimento di Fisica e Chimica "E. Segrè", Università degli Studi di Palermo, Via Archirafi 36, 90123, Palermo, Italy

[140] UCM-ELEC group, EMFTEL Department, University Complutense of Madrid, 28040 Madrid, Spain

[141] Departamento de Ingeniería Eléctrica, Universidad Pontificia de Comillas - ICAI, 28015 Madrid

[142] Universidad de Chile, Av. Libertador Bernardo O'Higgins 1058, Santiago, Chile

[143] Institute of Space Sciences (ICE, CSIC), and Institut d'Estudis Espacials de Catalunya (IEEC), and Institució Catalana de Recerca I Estudis Avançats (ICREA), Campus UAB, Carrer de Can Magrans, s/n 08193 Cerdanyola del Vallés, Spain

[144] The Henryk Niewodniczański Institute of Nuclear Physics, Polish Academy of Sciences, ul. Radzikowskiego 152, 31-342 Cracow, Poland

[145] IPARCOS Institute, Faculty of Physics (UCM), 28040 Madrid, Spain

[146] Department of Physics, Konan University, Kobe, Hyogo, 658-8501, Japan

[147] Hiroshima Astrophysical Science Center, Hiroshima University, Higashi-Hiroshima, Hiroshima 739-8526, Japan

[148] Department of Physics, Columbia University, 538 West 120th Street, New York, NY 10027, USA

[149] School of Allied Health Sciences, Kitasato University, Sagamihara, Kanagawa 228-8555, Japan

[150] Kavli Institute for Particle Astrophysics and Cosmology, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305, USA

[151] University of Białystok, Faculty of Physics, ul. K. Ciołkowskiego 1L, 15-245 Białystok, Poland

[152] Charles University, Institute of Particle & Nuclear Physics, V Holešovičkách 2, 180 00 Prague 8, Czech Republic

[153] Astronomical Observatory of Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, 8 Kyryla i Mephodia Street, Lviv, 79005, Ukraine

[154] Institute for Space—Earth Environmental Research, Nagoya University, Furo-cho, Chikusa-ku, Nagoya 464-8601, Japan

[155] Kobayashi—Maskawa Institute for the Origin of Particles and the Universe, Nagoya University, Furo-cho, Chikusa-ku, Nagoya 464-8602, Japan

[156] INAF - Osservatorio Astronomico di Palermo "G.S. Vaiana", Piazza del Parlamento 1, 90134 Palermo, Italy

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[157] Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of California, Los Angeles, CA 90095, USA

[158] Graduate School of Technology, Industrial and Social Sciences, Tokushima University, Tokushima 770-8506, Japan

[159] School of Physics & Center for Relativistic Astrophysics, Georgia Institute of Technology, 837 State Street, Atlanta, Georgia, 30332-0430, USA

[160] University of Pisa, Largo B. Pontecorvo 3, 56127 Pisa, Italy

[161] University of Rijeka, Faculty of Physics, Radmile Matejcic 2, 51000 Rijeka, Croatia

[162] Rudjer Boskovic Institute, Bijenicka 54, 10 000 Zagreb, Croatia

[163] INAF - Osservatorio Astronomico di Padova, Vicolo dell'Osservatorio 5, 35122 Padova, Italy

[164] INAF - Osservatorio Astronomico di Padova and INFN Sezione di Trieste, gr. coll. Udine, Via delle Scienze 208 I-33100 Udine, Italy

[165] INFN and Università degli Studi di Siena, Dipartimento di Scienze Fisiche, della Terra e dell'Ambiente (DSFTA), Sezione di Fisica, Via Roma 56, 53100 Siena, Italy

[166] Centre for Astro-Particle Physics (CAPP) and Department of Physics, University of Johannesburg, PO Box 524, Auckland Park 2006, South Africa

[167] University of Oxford, Department of Physics, Clarendon Laboratory, Parks Road, Oxford, OX1 3PU, United Kingdom

[168] Departamento de Física, Facultad de Ciencias Básicas, Universidad Metropolitana de Ciencias de la Educación, Avenida José Pedro Alessandri 774, Ñuñoa, Santiago, Chile

[169] Departamento de Astronomía, Universidad de Concepción, Barrio Universitario S/N, Concepción, Chile

[170] University of New South Wales, School of Science, Australian Defence Force Academy, Canberra, ACT 2600, Australia

[171] University of Split - FESB, R. Boskovica 32, 21 000 Split, Croatia

[172] EPFL Laboratoire d'astrophysique, Observatoire de Sauverny, CH-1290 Versoix, Switzerland

[173] Department of Physics, Humboldt University Berlin, Newtonstr. 15, 12489 Berlin, Germany

[174] Main Astronomical Observatory of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, Zabolotnoho str., 27, 03143, Kyiv, Ukraine

[175] Space Technology Centre, AGH University of Science and Technology, Aleja Mickiewicza, 30, 30-059, Kraków, Poland

[176] Academic Computer Centre CYFRONET AGH, ul. Nawojki 11, 30-950, Kraków, Poland

[177] Institute of Astronomy, Faculty of Physics, Astronomy and Informatics, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, ul. Grudziądzka 5, 87-100 Toruń, Poland

[178] Cherenkov Telescope Array Observatory gGmbH, Via Gobetti, Bologna, Italy

[179] Warsaw University of Technology, Faculty of Electronics and Information Technology, Institute of Electronic Systems, Nowowiejska 15/19, 00-665 Warsaw, Poland

[180] Physics Program, Graduate School of Advanced Science and Engineering, Hiroshima University, 739-8526 Hiroshima, Japan

[181] School of Physics and Astronomy, Sun Yat-sen University, Zhuhai, China

[182] Department of Physical Sciences, Aoyama Gakuin University, Fuchinobe, Sagamihara, Kanagawa, 252-5258, Japan

[183] Division of Physics and Astronomy, Graduate School of Science, Kyoto University, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto, 606-8502, Japan

[184] Port d'Informació Científica, Edifici D, Carrer de l'Albareda, 08193 Bellaterrra (Cerdanyola del Vallès), Spain

[185] INAF - Osservatorio Astrofisico di Torino, Strada Osservatorio 20, 10025 Pino Torinese (TO), Italy

[186] Departamento de Física, Universidad Técnica Federico Santa María, Avenida España, 1680 Valparaíso, Chile

[187] Faculty of Science, Ibaraki University, Mito, Ibaraki, 310-8512, Japan

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