

## Versatile Method to measure locomotion

Taylor Barwell, Sehaj Raina, and Laurent Seroude

*Department of Biology, Queen's University, BioSciences Complex, Kingston, Ontario  
K7L 3N6, Canada*

**Corresponding author:** Laurent Seroude (email: [seroude@queensu.ca](mailto:seroude@queensu.ca))

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**Abstract:** Many studies require the ability to quantify locomotor behavior over time. The list of tracking softwares and their capabilities are constantly growing. At the 2019 CanFly Conference we presented preliminary results from an investigation of the effects of expressing polyglutamine repeats in fly muscles on longevity, locomotion and protein aggregation and received a lot of inquiries about our protocol to measure locomotion and how to use the FlyTracker MatLab software. This report describes a versatile locomotion measuring device and custom MatLab scripts for the extraction and analysis, and compilation of FlyTracker data in a format compatible with spreadsheet softwares. The measurement and analysis of multiple genotypes and both sexes across age shows that this method yields reproducible results that confirm that normal aging is associated with a progressive decline in locomotion as indicated by increased immobility and reduced velocity.

## 23 Introduction

24 Locomotion is a fundamental behavioral trait involved directly or indirectly with  
25 almost all simple or complex behavior activities. It is also integral to studying a wide  
26 span of different biological phenomenon such as neurological or muscular pathologies,  
27 age associated changes and physiological responses. Measuring locomotion is  
28 challenging because of the many parameters that need to be controlled [1]. Additionally,  
29 the obtainment of large data sets requires automated system for tracking, data  
30 extraction and analysis.

31 *Drosophila* have proven to be a useful model to study some of the most complex  
32 behavioral phenotypes including: learning, memory [2, 3], sleep, circadian rhythms [4],  
33 courting, mating [5] and response to drugs, addiction [6]. With advances in technology  
34 numerous experimental setups, manual and automated tracking have been developed  
35 to describe and quantify fly locomotion [1].

36 Automated tracking relies on softwares that use a digital subtraction method to  
37 remove background and be able to distinguish the fly from optical or background  
38 artifacts [7-12]. Softwares can be used to track several flies at once in two or three  
39 dimensions, quantify specific fly behaviors (grooming, fighting, mating) as well as  
40 monitoring leg coordination of single animals [7, 12-19].

41 We chose the widely used, multi-platform FlyTracker MatLab software [15, 17,  
42 20] that does not require any expensive equipment. Essentially anyone with any camera  
43 and a computer can run the software and perform these experiments. FlyTracker  
44 detects very accurately multiple flies at once in a video and is able to track the position,  
45 orientation and angle of the wings and legs, as well as distance between the fly and the  
46 wall of the chamber housing the fly. At the 2019 CanFly Conference we presented  
47 preliminary results from an investigation of the effects of expressing polyglutamine  
48 repeats in fly muscles on longevity, locomotion and protein aggregation. We received a  
49 lot of inquiries about our protocol to measure locomotion and how to use FlyTracker.  
50 Here, we report a locomotion measuring device that can accommodate 5 to 50 flies and  
51 custom MatLab scripts for the extraction and analysis, and compilation of FlyTracker

52 data in a format compatible with spreadsheet softwares. Multiple genotypes, both sex  
53 and two experimental replicates across age demonstrate the reproducibility achieved.

54

## 55 **Materials and Methods**

### 56 **Construction of the arena**

57 A drill press was used to drill 2.5cm circles into thin (3mm), clear plexi glass in  
58 rows of 5. The rows were cut into strips (Figure 1A). A piece of clear plexi glass the  
59 same dimensions as the strip was adhered to the back of the strip with superglue. By  
60 constructing chambers in strips the arena can be adapted to accommodate experiments  
61 requiring 5 chambers and up to 50. A base was made from another piece of plexi glass,  
62 large enough to fit all 10 strips (Figure 1A). A small hole is drilled near the edge of the  
63 base to load the flies. Three small pieces of plexi glass were cut and glued to the base  
64 to use as a guide for positioning the strips consistently. Legs were made for the base  
65 out of cuvettes.

### 66 **Fly Husbandry**

67 Crosses were set up in bottles to obtain desired genotypes. Four different wild-  
68 type genotypes were obtained by crossing male  $w^{1118}$  with UAS-Httex1-Q72-eGFP and  
69 UAS-Httex1-Q25-eGFP[21] and female  $w^{1118}$  with DJ694 [22] and MHC-Geneswitch  
70 [23]. After allowing the parents to mate for 2 days, they were then transferred to a  
71 second set of bottles to generate a replicate. The second set of bottles was emptied  
72 after two days. Staged flies (0-2 days) were collected under nitrogen anesthesia. A  
73 minimum of 4 sample vials for each sex of each genotype containing a minimum of 25  
74 flies were collected. This was repeated for the replicate crosses. Flies were allowed to  
75 recover for at least 1 day before being recorded. Flies were maintained on standard fly  
76 food (0.01% molasses, 8.2% cornmeal, 3.4% yeast, 0.94% agar, 0.18% benzoic acid,  
77 0.66% propionic acid) at 23-26°C for the duration of the experiment.

### 78 **Experimental Setup**

79 A chamber strip was positioned such that the first chamber was circle side down  
80 over top of the loading hole of the base. Flies were aspirated from the vial. Once one fly  
81 was loaded into the chamber through the loading hole the arena strip is slid such that

82 the second chamber was over top of the loading hole, effectively preventing the fly from  
83 escaping. Once all 5 flies in a strip were loaded the strip was slid into place using the  
84 guides on the base.

85 The process was repeated until all the chambers were loaded. The base is then  
86 placed atop of a light box, the legs provide an air insulation layer that prevents heating  
87 from the light bulbs. A piece of white paper is placed on the light box to diffuse the light.  
88 An iPod touch was clamped in a fixed position 40 cm above the light box to capture a  
89 single video file encompassing all 50 chambers. Video capturing was performed at 23-  
90 26°C with the light table on and the lights in the room off (Figure 1B).

91 Flies were acclimatized for 1 minute before beginning recording (3 min at 30 frames per  
92 second). After recording, flies were aspirated from the arenas out through the hole and  
93 returned to their vials. In a given video each genotype was measured in triplicate. Flies  
94 were aspirated from one of the four sample vials that were collected, alternating the vial  
95 at each recorded time point. The positions of the genotypes in the arena were  
96 rearranged each day a recording was done to eliminate bias coming from any specific  
97 chamber. Since our genotypes were measured in triplicate, the genotypes shifted by 3  
98 for each time point. Therefore, the number of possible arena configurations is equal to  
99 the number of genotypes tested. Supplemental Table 3 shows an example of the  
100 various arena configurations for a 16-genotype experiment.

### 101 **Software and Files Requirement**

102 Download FlyTracker [20] from: <http://www.vision.caltech.edu/Tools/FlyTracker/download.html>.  
103 Download the DataExtractionScripts (Supplemental Information) and copy and paste  
104 each script (Data Extraction Script and Data Compilation Script) in MatLab. The Data  
105 Extraction Script is annotated (in green) and includes instructions (in orange) to replace  
106 parameters (in red) to accommodate any experimental setup. The Data Extraction  
107 Script generates spreadsheet files (.xls and .csv) which, once grouped in a single folder  
108 can be processed by the Data Compilation Script to obtain an .xls file combining all  
109 experimental data for further analysis, statistical processing and graphing. A custom  
110 Arena Configuration table will need to be created (similar to Supplemental Table 3) with

111 the configurations in columns and the chamber numbers in rows. This table can be  
112 created in a spreadsheet software and copied into MatLab.

### 113 **FlyTracker Tracking**

114 FlyTracker requires the video files to be stored in a folder. We organized our  
115 video files in folders by date. The path was set in MatLab for FlyTracker. The 'tracker.m'  
116 script was run. Specifications for video length, frame rate, and processing options can  
117 be selected in the FlyTracker interface. In the Calibrator interface the resolution, number  
118 of arenas, number of flies per arena, size and position of arenas, and contrast  
119 thresholds for detecting the fly were all selected. Once tracked, all tracking results were  
120 verified in the Visualizer interface to ensure accurate tracking. For each video file  
121 analyzed, FlyTracker outputs 'feat.mat' and 'track.mat' structure files.

### 122 **Data Analysis**

123 The 'feat.mat' and 'track.mat' files are dragged and dropped into the Workspace  
124 in Matlab and the Data Extraction Script is run to generate spreadsheet files (.xls and  
125 .csv). The script uses the Arena Configurations table to assign a genotype according to  
126 the chamber number and compiles the distance, the number of frames detecting the  
127 presence of the fly, velocity and % time spent immobile (calculated from the number of  
128 frames where the fly is immobile). The .xls files are then moved to a single folder and  
129 the Data Compilation Script is used to compile them into a single .xls file. Using  
130 Microsoft Excel, the values obtained for all 3 individuals for each of the parameters  
131 (distance, velocity, % time immobile) were averaged to give a single time point  
132 respectively for each parameter. This was executed for both replicates.

133

### 134 **Results and Discussion**

135 Our locomotion measuring device is designed to be adaptable to experiments  
136 measuring between 1 and 50 flies (Figure 1). The device was tested with 15 flies (3  
137 strips) and up to 48 flies (10 strips). The resolution of HD 1080p cameras is not  
138 sufficient to be able to use more than 10 strips without losing the ability to accurately  
139 track every individual fly.

140 Four wild type phenotypes with different genetic backgrounds were recorded for  
141 3 minutes at multiple time points across age (3-63 days) at the same time of the day to  
142 avoid circadian effects. The resulting video files are tracked and analyzed in MatLab  
143 using FlyTracker and a custom script to calculate the percentage of time spent immobile  
144 and compile it with the instantaneous velocity and the total distance. The distance  
145 allows to distinguish between flies that moved sporadically versus those that moved  
146 consistently the whole duration of the recording, which may influence their velocity.

147 Figure 2 (Supplemental Table 1) shows the results of two replicates of four male  
148 genotypes UAS-Httex1-Q25-eGFP/+, UAS-Httex1-Q72-eGFP/Y, DJ694/+ and MHC/+.  
149 The percentage of time spent immobile increases with all genotypes across age in both  
150 replicates (blue and orange). On average, the percentage of time spent immobile  
151 remains below 20% for all the genotypes up until day 29 and by late life (50-60 days)  
152 the percent immobility reaches about 80%. Additionally, the distance traveled and  
153 velocity declined with all male genotypes across age in both replicates. On average, the  
154 distances traveled begins to decline at day 16 and remains below 10000mm into late  
155 life. With the velocity, all genotypes started with an average between 10-15mm/s then at  
156 day 24-29 decline to below 10mm/s.

157 Figure 3 (Supplemental Table 2) shows the results of two replicates of four  
158 female genotypes UAS-Httex1-Q25-eGFP/+, UAS-Httex1-Q72-eGFP/X, DJ694/+ and  
159 MHC/+. The percentage of time spent immobile increases with all genotypes across age  
160 in both replicates (blue and orange). The female genotypes showed very similar results  
161 to the males, on average the percentage of time spent immobile remained below 20%  
162 and by day 50-60 it reaches about 80%. Also, the distance traveled and velocity showed  
163 similar results to the males, at day 16 the distance declined below 10000mm and the  
164 velocity decreased below 10mm/s at day 24-29.

165 It has been known for a long time that advancing age is correlated with  
166 behavioral declines. Declines in negative geotaxis, flight and locomotion have  
167 previously been reported with a variety of different experimental approaches [24-30].  
168 The method used in this study yields reproducible results that indeed confirm in multiple

169 genotypes and both sexes that normal aging is associated with a progressive decline in  
170 locomotion as of result of increased immobility and reduced velocity.

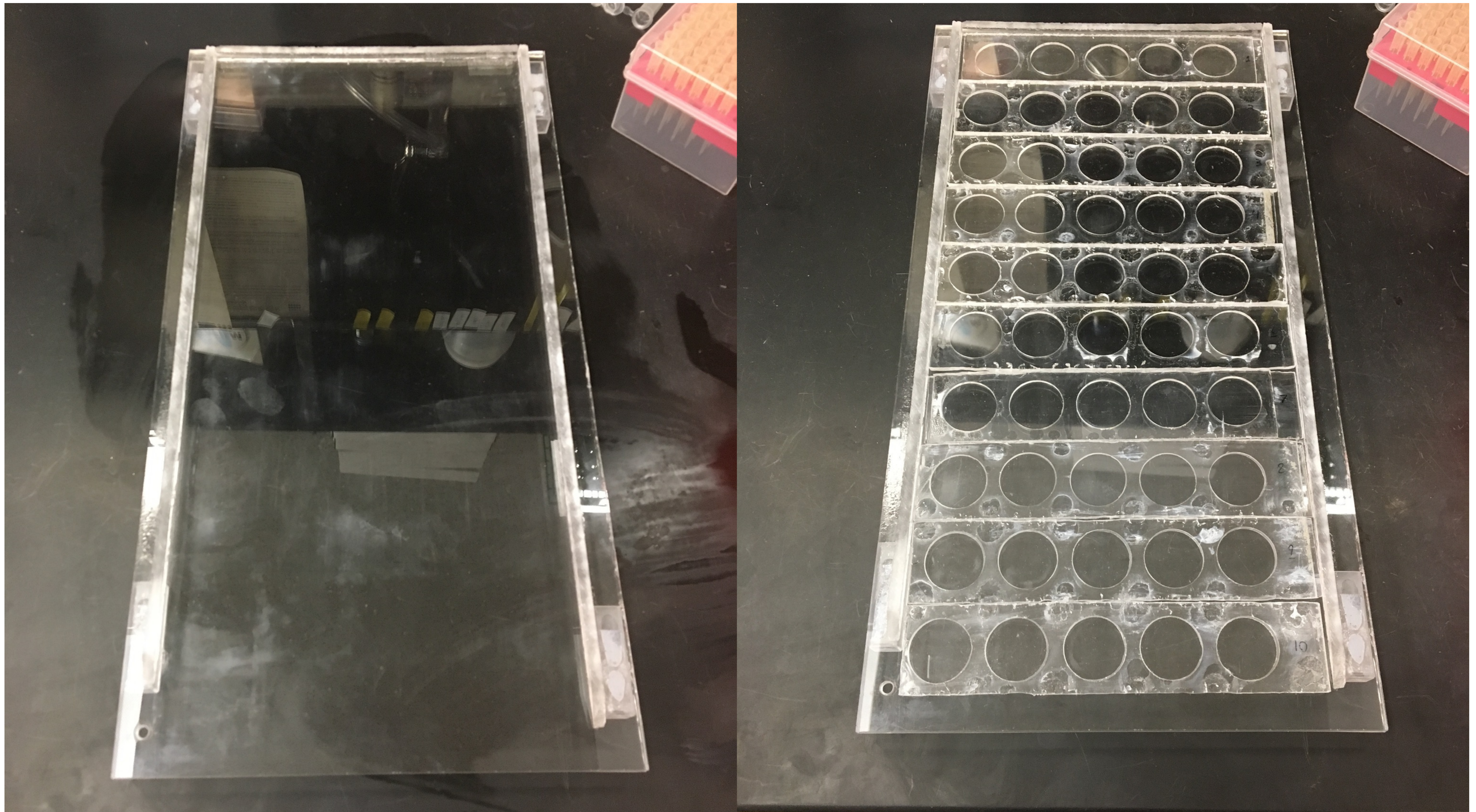
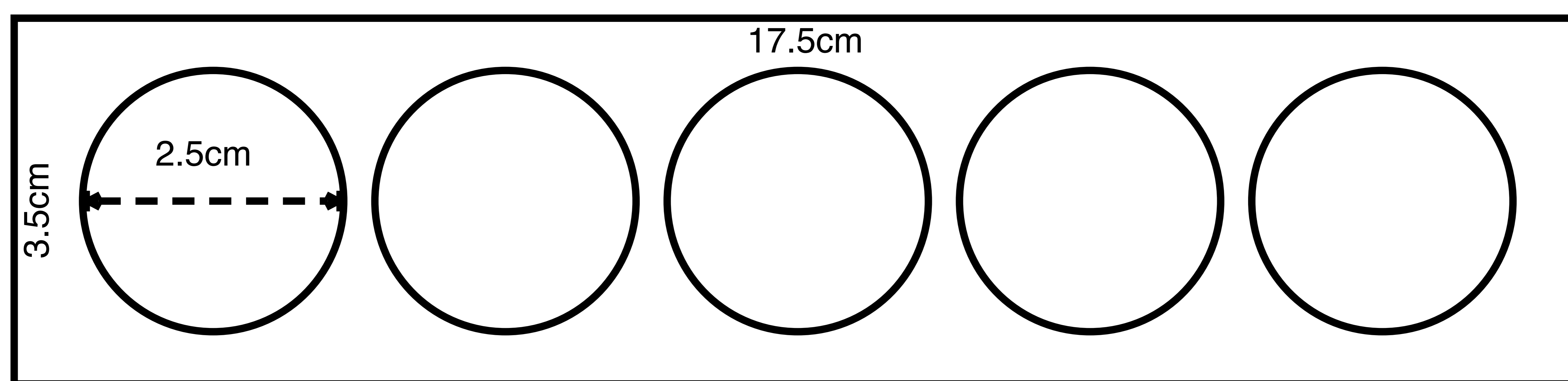
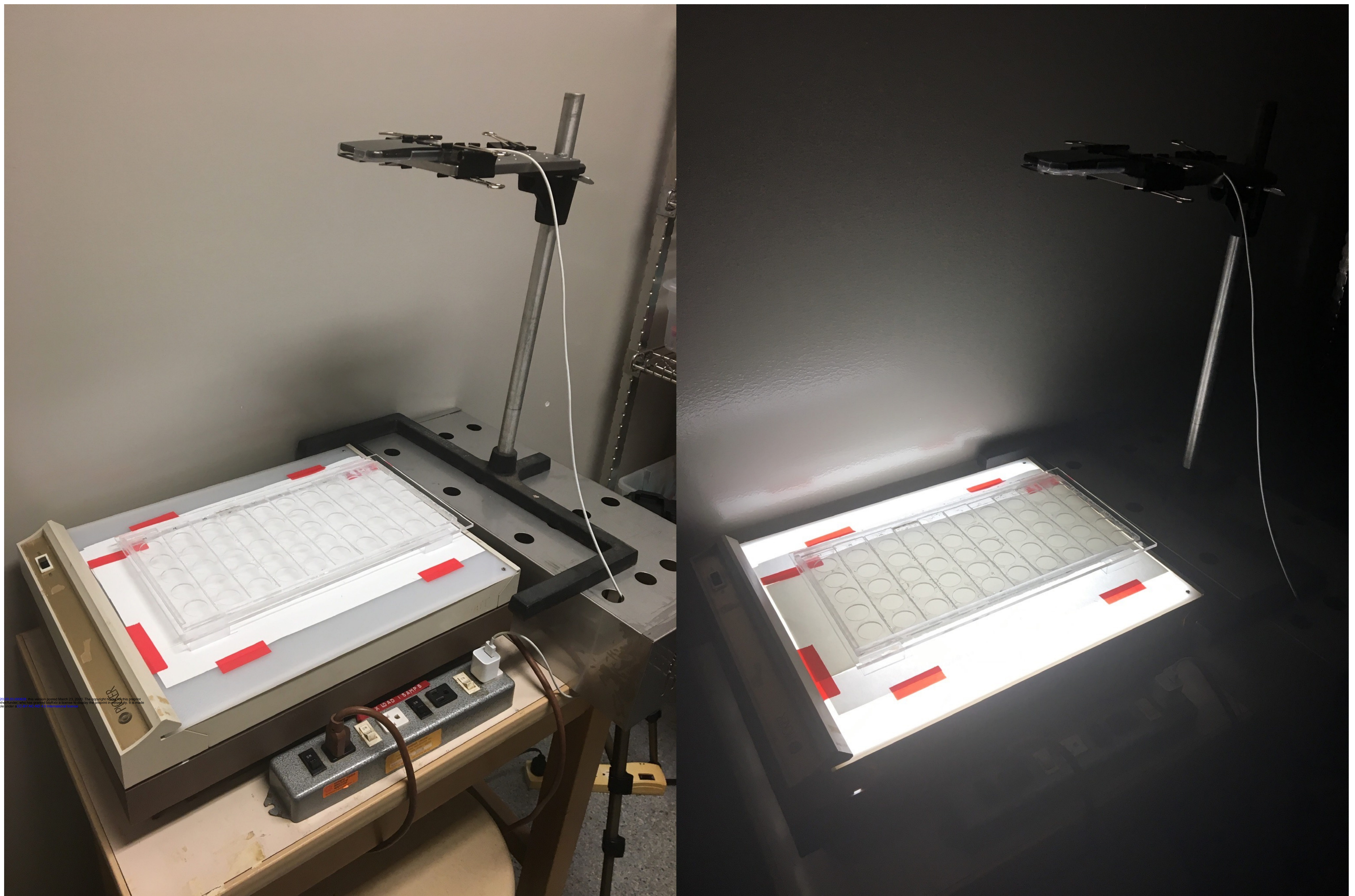
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245  
246



**A)****B)**

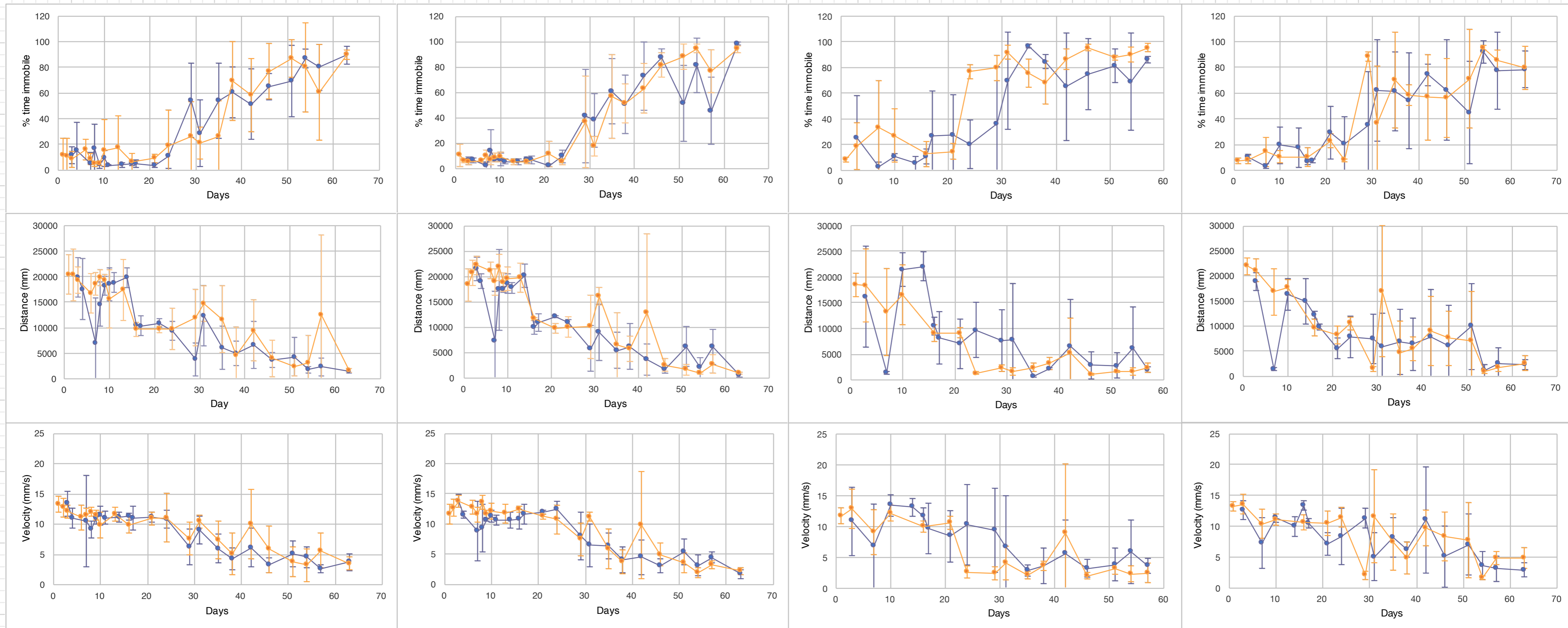
**Fig. 1.** (A) Dimensions of a 5 chamber strip used in the arena. Photo of the base (without strips: left, with strips: right). The strips allow you to customize for the number of chambers needed (5-50). (B) Experimental set up. The base with the loaded chambers is positioned atop A piece of paper taped to the light box to diffuse the light. Recordings are done with the lights in the room off and the light box on to maximize contrast with the fly.

Q25/+

Q72/Y

DJ694/+

MHC/+



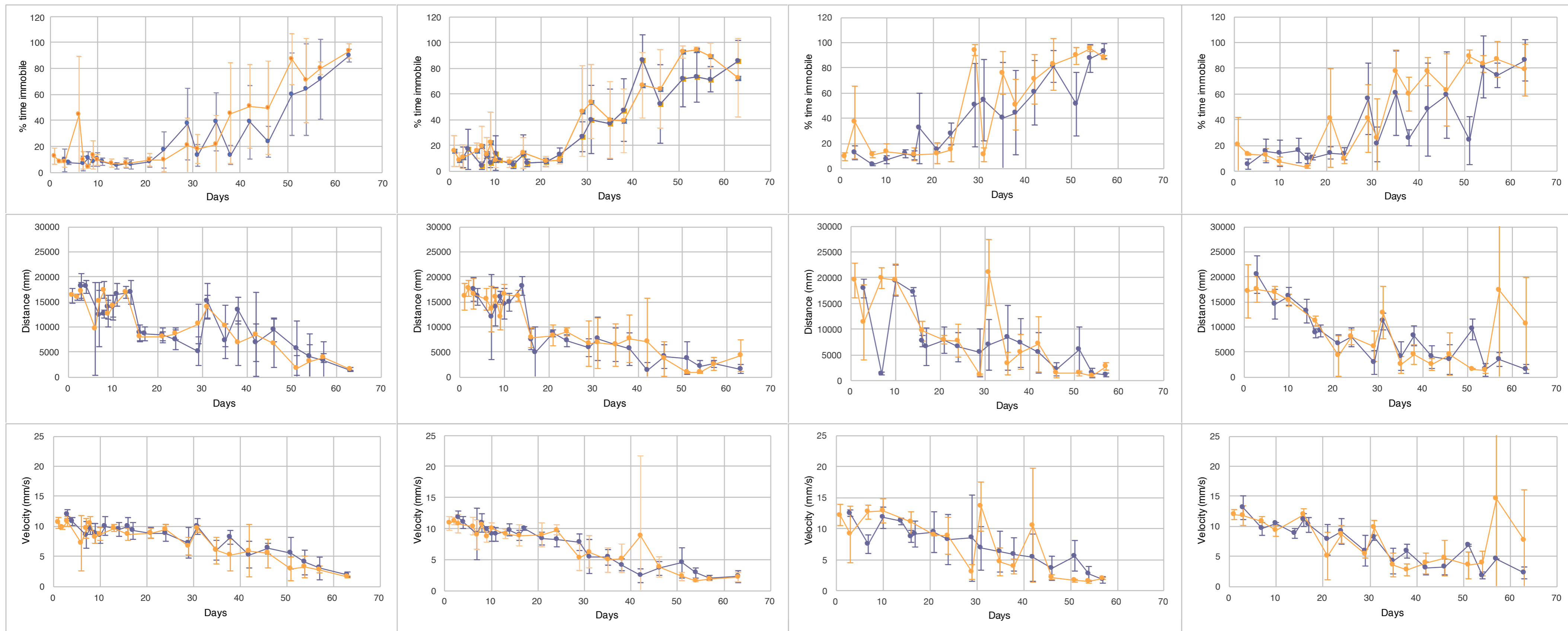
**Fig. 2.** Locomotion of male UAS-Httex1-Q25-eGFP/+, UAS-Httex1-Q72-eGFP/Y, DJ694/+ and MHC/+ flies across age (x axis) as measured by percentage of time spent immobile (top), distance traveled (middle) and velocity (bottom). The blue and orange lines denote each of the independent replicates (each replicate n=3). Error bars represent  $\pm$ SD.

Q25/+

Q72/X

DJ694/+

MHC/+



**Fig. 3.** Locomotion of female UAS-Httex1-Q25-eGFP/+, UAS-Httex1-Q72-eGFP/X, DJ694/+ and MHC/+ flies across age (x axis) as measured by percentage of time spent immobile (top), distance traveled (middle) and velocity (bottom). The blue and orange lines denote each of the independent replicates (each replicate n=3). Error bars represent  $\pm$ SD.

















## DATA EXTRACTION SCRIPT

---

```
%Loading in data and setting up initial parameters
% Replace ArenaConfigsMHCMale by the name of your configuration file
load("ArenaConfigsMHCMale")
% Change frametoanalyze value to accommodate length of analyzed video file, 5400: 3 min at 30 frames/s
frametoanalyze=5400;
trkdatasize=size(trk.data);
Numberofarena=trkdatasize(1,1);
% Remove or add 'number' to the required number of configurations
Arenaconfig=menu('Choose Configuration','1','2','3','4','5','6','7','8','9','10','11','12','13','14','15','16');
% Replace ArenaConfigsMHCMale by the name of your configuration file
Configuration=ArenaConfigsMHCMale(1:48,Arenaconfig+1);
Conf=table2array(Configuration);
prompt={'Enter Age'};
title="Input";
dims=[1 40];
AgeAsText=inputdlg(prompt,title,dims);
Age=str2double(AgeAsText);
prompt={'Starting Arena'};
title="Input";
dims=[1 40];
ArenaAsText=inputdlg(prompt,title,dims);
Arena=str2double(ArenaAsText);
flydata=zeros(frametoanalyze+2,Numberofarena*4);
%Extracting data of interest and forming an array
for i=1:Numberofarena
    %Setting up starting points for calculations
    framenumbers=frametoanalyze;
    distance=0;
    timeimmobile=0;
    velocity=0;
    VelocityFrames=5399;
    %Calculating data of interest
    for j=2:frametoanalyze
        if or(isnan(trk.data(i,j,2)),isnan(trk.data(i,j-1,2)))
        else
            distance=distance+sqrt((trk.data(i,j-1,2)-trk.data(i,j,2))^2+(trk.data(i,j-1,1)-trk.data(i,j,1))^2);
```

```

    end
    if or(isnan(feats.data(i,j,1)),isnan(trk.data(i,j,2)))
        VelocityFrames=VelocityFrames-1;
    else
        if feats.data(i,j,1)<1
            timeimmobile=timeimmobile+1;
        else
            velocity=velocity+feats.data(i,j,1);
        end
    end
end
end
%Calculating numbers of frames to analyze
for j=1:frametoanalyze
    if or(isnan(trk.data(i,j,1)),isnan(trk.data(i,j,2)))
        framenumbers=framenumbers-1;
    end
    %Extracting x, y, velocity, and distance and placing them in to
    %their respective columns. Adds data of interest at the bottom.
    flydata(:,(4*(i-1)+1))=[trk.data(i,1:frametoanalyze,1),framenumbers,0]';
    flydata(:,(4*(i-1)+2))=[trk.data(i,1:frametoanalyze,2),distance,VelocityFrames]';
    flydata(:,(4*(i-1)+3))=[feats.data(i,1:frametoanalyze,1),timeimmobile,velocity/(VelocityFrames-timeimmobile)]';
    flydata(:,(4*(i-1)+4))=[feats.data(i,1:frametoanalyze,9),0,0]';
end
end
%Processing Data and compiling in to a table
flyprocesseddata=cell(Numberofarena,8);
for i=1:Numberofarena
    flyprocesseddata(i,1)={Conf((i-1)+Arena),1)};
    flyprocesseddata(i,2)={"Male"};
    flyprocesseddata(i,3)={Age};
    flyprocesseddata(i,4)={Arena+(i-1)};
    flyprocesseddata(i,5)={flydata(5401,(4*(i-1)+1))};
    flyprocesseddata(i,6)={((flydata(5401,(4*(i-1)+3)))/VelocityFrames)*100};
    flyprocesseddata(i,7)={flydata(5401,(4*(i-1)+2))};
    flyprocesseddata(i,8)={flydata(5402,(4*(i-1)+3))};
end
%Sets up table with variable names
FlyFinal=cell2table(flyprocesseddata,...
    'VariableNames',{ 'Genotype', 'Gender', 'Age', 'Arena', 'Frames', 'PercentImmobile', 'Distance', 'Velocity'});

```

```
%Writing to file
if i==1
    %If analyzing data from a single arena, arena number added to name of file
    % Replace MHC Male by the desired name for the saved file
    FileName=strcat("MHC Male",cell2mat(AgeAsText),cell2mat(ArenaAsText),".xls");
else
    % Replace MHC Male by the desired name for the saved file
    FileName=strcat("MHC Male",cell2mat(AgeAsText),".xls");
end
%Prompting save path
[file,path]=uiputfile(FileName);
CSVFileName=strcat(path,'Flydata',FileName);
FileName=strcat(path,file);
writetable(FlyFinal,FileName);
xlswrite(CSVFileName,flydata)
END OF DATA EXTRACTION SCRIPT
```

---

## DATA COMPILATION SCRIPT

---

```
dname = uigetdir();
Filelist=struct2table(dir(dname));
FileList=Filelist(Filelist.isdir==false,'name');
FileList2=FileList(endsWith(Filelist.name,'.xls'),'name');
DirSize=size(FileList2);
FileName=strcat(dname,"/",cell2mat(FileList2{1,1}));
Compilation=readtable(FileName);
for i=2:DirSize(1,1)
    FileName=strcat(dname,"/",cell2mat(FileList2{i,1}));
    Compilation=[Compilation;readtable(FileName)];
end
FileName=strcat(dname,"/Compilation.xls");
writetable(Compilation,FileName)
END OF DATA COMPILATION SCRIPT
```

---