

1 Hierarchical Spatial Search Strategies in *Drosophila*

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10

11 ABSTRACT

12 Animals rely on multiple sensory information systems to make decisions. The integration of
13 information stemming from these systems is believed to result in a precise behavioural
14 output. To what degree a single sensory system may override the others is unknown.
15 Evidence for a hierarchical use of different systems to guide navigation is lacking. We
16 used *Drosophila melanogaster* to investigate whether, in order to relieve an unpleasant
17 stimulation, fruit flies employed an idiothetically-based local search strategy before making
18 use of visual information, or viceversa. Fruit flies appear to initially resort to idiothetic
19 information and only later, if the first strategy proves unsuccessful to relieve the
20 unpleasant stimulation, make use of other information, such as visual cues. By leveraging
21 on this innate preference for a hierarchical use of one strategy over another, we believe
22 that *in vivo* recordings of brain activity during the navigation of fruit flies could provide
23 mechanistic insights into how simultaneous information from multiple sensory modalities is
24 evaluated, integrated, and motor responses elicited, thus shedding new light on the neural
25 basis of decision-making.

26 **1. Introduction**

27 Animals make use of different information to explore their surroundings. Olfactory [1],
28 visual [2–4] cues and self-centred (idiothetic) path integration [5–9] can be used to
29 navigate an environment in search for food [10], relief [11] or for the purpose of mating
30 [12,13]. The reductionist approach to behavioural neuroscience has so far provided
31 mechanistic insights into how each sensory modality drives specific behaviours [14], but
32 the knowledge of the relationships between different sensory information systems, and
33 how animals use these to reach their goals is just at its beginning [15–17]. To the best of
34 our knowledge, there is no evidence for a hierarchical use of different information systems
35 to guide navigation in simple animal models [18]. Invertebrates, particularly insects, are
36 excellent models to study how a less complex brain produces behaviours [19,20]. Insects
37 can be trained to pinpoint a location in space where an unpleasant stimulation ceases,
38 where food may be present, or where a pleasant sensation may be experienced [2,21–23].
39 Insects explore their environment while relying on multiple sources of information, of which
40 the most studied are visual cues and path integration. Visual stimuli can be associated
41 with a stimulus of relevance to the animal, and having a positive valence, such as the
42 obtainment of food, the relief from a negative stimulus or the possibility of mating. Path
43 integration is the behavioural output of an “internal pacemaker”, the activity of which
44 guides the locomotion of the animal in order to maximize its chance of reaching a relevant
45 stimulus previously encountered while navigating. We used *Drosophila melanogaster* to
46 investigate whether we could find evidence for the hierarchical use of different sources of
47 information; specifically, we asked the question whether, in order to relieve an unpleasant
48 stimulation, fruit flies employed an idiothetically-based local search strategy before making
49 use of visual information, or viceversa.

51 **2. Materials and Methods**

52 We obtained the experimental progeny, characterised by the expression of a red-shifted
53 rhodopsin in bitter-sensing neurons, from crossing Blooming Stock Center (BSC) line
54 57670 (in which expression of Gal4 was restricted to bitter-sensing neurons), to BSC line
55 55135, a UAS-CsChrimson construct-bearing line. Thus, these transgenic flies are
56 characterised by having bitter-sensing neurons that can be stimulated via brief red-light
57 pulses [24,25]. For our behavioural experiments we opted to use only 6 to 10-day-old adult
58 male flies. A single fly was loaded into a circular arena of 109mm diameter, in which the
59 insect was free to walk, but not fly. The arena was loaded on a raised platform, which was
60 illuminated from below by an infrared-emitting lamp. Optogenetic stimulation was delivered
61 with a pair of 3 red-light (627nm) emitting LEDs placed on opposing sides of the arena and
62 30 cm above it. A cylinder composed of 48 panels, each consisting of an 8x8 grid of green
63 (520nm) LEDs, was lowered around the arena. The LEDs were programmed to display
64 two diametrically opposed black stripes, one vertical and the other horizontal, each
65 spanning an equal area on an evenly green lit background. The vertical stripe was
66 spatially-matched to a 6cm² "safe zone" (i.e. a zone where no optogenetic stimulation
67 occurred). In order to trigger/shut off optogenetic stimulation according to the spatial
68 location of the fly, we recorded fly movements inside the arena with a Chameleon 3 (FLIR,
69 USA) camera equipped with an IR bandpass filter and live-tracked fly locomotion at 11
70 frames-per-second with a customised version of the Motion-Based Multiple Object
71 Tracking script by MathWorks®. Real-time fly coordinates were used by the script to drive
72 a Genuino board's output signals (and consequently the optogenetic stimulation) as
73 follows: whenever the xy coordinates of the centroid representing the fly were within a
74 "safe zone" in the arena, the optogenetic stimulus was turned off; as soon as the fly left the
75 safe zone, the stimulus was turned on and the fly bitter-sensing neurons were stimulated.
76 Behavioural experiments consisted of two parts, a training session and a probe session.

77 Each training session was made up of 16 trials. We did not consider the first trial in our
78 analysis, given that flies had not yet had any experience of a safe spatial location. During
79 the first 30 seconds of each trial the fly was free to explore the arena in complete
80 darkness; for the next 30 seconds the fly could explore the arena in the presence of the
81 green LED visual patterns. During the last 2 minutes of each trial, the fly could be
82 subjected to optogenetic stimulation according to its position in the arena, still in the
83 presence of the green LED visual patterns. On alternate trials, the whole green LED
84 panorama was rotated by 180°: during odd numbered trials (1st, 3rd, ..., 15th) the safe
85 zone was adjacent to the 'southern end' of the arena and matched to the vertical stripe;
86 during even numbered trials, the safe zone was adjacent to the 'northern end' of the arena
87 and matched to the vertical stripe (figure 1A). If not otherwise specified, data from the
88 analysis that follow were obtained from 140 experiments (flies N = 140). We analysed our
89 data with a regression model selection-based approach. Full details on methods and
90 statistical analyses are presented in electronic supplementary materials, methods S1 [26–
91 33]. The procedures described herein had also been implemented in [34]. Detailed
92 characteristics of each regression model can be found in electronic supplementary
93 material, table S1.

94

95 **3. Results and Discussion**

96 It has been extensively shown that *Drosophila melanogaster* can be trained to distinguish
97 identical objects with different orientations [35–37]. We therefore trained flies to
98 differentiate between a vertical black stripe, linked to relief from optogenetically-induced
99 bitter taste, from a diametrically-opposed horizontal one (figure 1B-D, electronic
100 supplementary material, figure S1). At the beginning of each new trial, the vertical stripe –
101 safe zone match and the horizontal stripe positions were switched. In this way, at the start
102 of each new trial and at the first onset of optogenetic stimulation, fruit flies could potentially

103 experience two conflicting sources of information as to where relief could take place: either
104 in the spatial location where flies previously (in the preceding trial) experienced relief
105 (PreviousSafeZone – currently matched to the horizontal stripe) or in the current location
106 of the vertical stripe (SafeZone). In this ambiguous situation, the animal is faced with the
107 possibility of using a search strategy based either on local path integration or on visual
108 information. To start with, we focused our attention on the behaviour of flies at the start of
109 each new trial, 30” before the first onset of optogenetic stimulation and 30” after its onset.
110 This 60-second period (from frame 330 to frame 990) was further divided into 6, 10-second
111 sub-periods. As expected, this analysis revealed that in each new trial, before the onset of
112 the first optogenetic stimulation, fruit flies were more numerous in the region where the
113 previous safe zone was located than in the region where the current safe zone was
114 located (figure 2A). As soon as the optogenetic stimulation started, fruit flies left the
115 previous safe zone and began searching for relief on the opposite side of the arena (in the
116 location corresponding to the current vertical stripe – safe zone match). As a
117 consequence, following the onset of optogenetic stimulation, flies began to spend more
118 time in the safe zone and less in the previous safe zone (figure 2B). This feature can also
119 be seen in the density plots in figure 2D and 2E, as a reduction in the density of residency
120 in the previous safe zone in favour of the current safe zone (demarcated by the square).
121 One might expect that, following the onset of optogenetic stimulation, there should be an
122 increase in the searching behaviour of the fruit flies in the vicinity of the current safe zone.
123 Nonetheless, we show that throughout the whole training session, at the start of each new
124 trial, at the first onset of the negative stimulation, fruit flies showed an equally elevated
125 frequency of entries into either the previous safe zone or into the current safe zone (figure
126 2C), suggesting that some flies searched for relief in the previous safe zone. Furthermore,
127 this behaviour does not appear to be affected by learning: in fact, training progression
128 influenced neither the number of flies in both zones nor the number of visits to both zones

129 between frames 330-990 (i.e. training progression is not a significant predictor of the
130 aforementioned variables, electronic supplementary material, table S1). In order to identify
131 the group of flies that, at the onset of the optogenetic stimulus entered the previous safe
132 zone, we subset all the 140 flies object of our study into three subgroups: 1. flies which
133 were inside the previous safe zone at the beginning of the stimulation (at frame 661); 2.
134 flies that, in that same moment were inside the current safe zone; 3. flies that were in
135 neither of the preceding zones. Since flies which were already inside the current safe zone
136 at the onset of the optogenetic stimulation would not have experienced virtual bitter taste,
137 we discarded this group of flies from this analysis, and considered only the two remaining
138 groups. In figure 3A we show that the mean number of flies that were already inside the
139 previous zone (blue pointrange) at frame 661 did not change in the 10 seconds after the
140 onset of stimulation; on the other hand, flies that were outside the previous safe zone
141 (orange pointrange) proceeded to enter the previous safe zone after the onset of
142 stimulation, thus increasing the overall number of flies therein. This sudden entrance of
143 flies from outside the previous safe zone is also seen in figure 3C, where an increase in
144 the number of visits of this group of flies to the previous safe zone is evidenced. However,
145 following the onset of optogenetic stimulation both groups of flies spend less time in the
146 previous safe zone: this is because notwithstanding the increase in the number of visits to
147 the previous zone, such visits are of short duration (since no relief is provided), suggesting
148 that flies “attempt” to obtain relief from the bitter taste stimulation by entering the previous
149 safe zone but, since this does not provide any relief, they quickly move away from that
150 location. The density plots in figure 3D-F show the change in residency density for each of
151 the two groups of flies separately, and for both groups considered together, respectively.
152 As evidenced by the data plotted in Figure 3, the group of flies that were outside of both
153 zones at the onset of the optogenetic stimulation were responsible for the increase in the
154 number of visits and in the mean number of flies in that same zone. However, as may be

155 noticed in figure 3E, some of the fruit flies in this group entered the current safe zone, as
156 evidenced by the increased residence density in the plots of the 10 seconds after the
157 onset of the stimulation. We therefore investigated how many of the flies which were
158 previously outside both zones then entered the safe zone or the previous safe zone. We
159 found that flies belonging to this group increased their number of visits in the same
160 measure to both zones (previous safe zone and safe zone) in the 10 seconds immediately
161 following the start of stimulation (figure 4B), and this is reflected also on the mean number
162 of flies that can be found in both zones during this period (figure 4A). The previous safe
163 zone and the (current) safe zone were visited in the same measure by the same number of
164 flies, suggesting that flies did not take into consideration which visual marker they were
165 approaching. Given that this behavioural choice (choosing which zone to explore first)
166 does not appear to depend upon learning (i.e. training progression, also for this subgroup
167 of flies, does not influence the number of flies/number of visits to both zones, electronic
168 supplementary material, table S1) and that fruit flies can differentiate between a vertical
169 and a horizontal bar (electronic supplementary material, figure S1) [35–37], we wished to
170 ascertain whether fruit flies entered preferentially into one of the two zones based on their
171 spatial location in the arena (i.e. proximity to one of the two zones). Thus, we divided the
172 group of flies outside of both zones at frame 661 according to which was the first zone
173 entered. Figure 5A and 5C show the positions of the flies that entered the previous safe
174 zone (marked by the horizontal bar) or the current safe zone respectively, during the trials
175 in which the safe zone was located at the northern-end of the arena (marked by the
176 vertical bar); whereas, Figure 5F and 5H, show the same information relative to the trials in
177 which the safe zone was located at the southern-end of the arena. These density plots
178 suggest that flies tend to enter the zone which was closest to them at the onset of the
179 optogenetic stimulation. We thus tested whether the spatial distribution of each group of
180 flies, for each set of trials (i.e. subdivided according to whether the safe zone was at the

181 northern end of the arena or at the southern end) was more aggregated than the
182 distribution expected under the hypotheses of a random distribution. To do this, we applied
183 Marcon and Peuch's M function [29–31] and tested if the observed spatial distribution of
184 flies presented evidence of a greater aggregation than the random expectation
185 represented by 10.000 simulated random distributions. For both sets of trials (i.e.
186 north/south according to where the safe zone was located), and for both groups (i.e. which
187 zone was entered first), flies showed evidence for significantly greater aggregation than
188 expected under the null hypothesis of random distribution (figure 5B and 5D and 5G and
189 5I). Moreover, if at the time of onset of the optogenetic stimulation, the position of a fly in
190 the arena may be considered a predictor of which will be the first zone to be visited, the
191 positions of the flies which are predicted to enter the previous safe zone should not show
192 any overlap with the positions of the flies which are predicted to enter the current safe
193 zone (i.e. the two groups should be spatially segregated). We found that the two groups of
194 flies show significant segregation in both sets of trials (figure 5E and 5L). We also
195 conducted a further set of experiments, with 40 more flies, in which the visual environment
196 presented two identical and diametrically opposed vertical stripes, with only one of them
197 matched to a safe zone. With this set of experiments we reproduced the results previously
198 described herein, suggesting that the initial search strategy employed by the flies object of
199 the present work appears to be independent of visual cues (electronic supplementary
200 material, figure S2 and S3), is not a consequence of learning and shows evidence of being
201 guided by the spatial location of the fly at the onset of the negative stimulation much in the
202 same way as occurs in the case of an idiotetically-based local search strategy (path
203 integration) [6,8,38]. In fact, at the beginning of a new trial, before the optogenetic
204 stimulation begins, the fruit flies are free to explore the environment without being
205 punished: as flies experience the first instance of bitter-taste (at frame 661), the closest
206 spatial location that yielded no punishment is in the vicinity of the fly itself (namely, where

207 the fly was at frame 660). Thus, it is straightforward for an animal to search for relief in the
208 vicinity of its current position.

209

210 **4. Conclusions**

211 With the paradigm employed in these experiments and the large sample of flies tested, we
212 provide evidence for a consistent hierarchical use of information during spatial navigation
213 in *D. melanogaster*. Our experiments show that fruit flies, when forced to choose between
214 relying on self-centred or visual cues to guide their local search, appear to initially resort to
215 idiothetic information and only later, if the first strategy proves unsuccessful, make use of
216 other information, such as visual cues. The reasons for such a consistent hierarchical use
217 of one informational system over another are at present unknown, but we advance the
218 hypothesis that employing path integration as the first spatial search strategy possibly
219 requires less computation, thus yielding faster behavioural responses, than the evaluation
220 and sensory integration of external (i.e. visual) information. By leveraging on this innate
221 preference of a hierarchical use of one strategy over another, *in vivo* recordings of brain
222 activity during the navigation of fruit flies could provide mechanistic insights into how
223 simultaneous information from multiple sensory modalities is evaluated, integrated and
224 motor responses elicited, thus shedding new light on the neural basis of decision-making.

225

226 **Figure captions**

227 **Figure 1. Paradigm and fruit flies training**

228 A) brief summary of the behavioural paradigm and experimental question; B) time spent
229 (s) in the safe zone, marked by the vertical stripe, compared to the time spent in the non-
230 safe zone (marked by the horizontal stripe) during 16 trials of training. Flies spent

231 significantly more time in the safe zone during the time when optogenetic stimulation may
232 occur than in a homologous zone where no relief is provided (number of observations =
233 280, linear mixed-effects (lme) model with zone as explanatory variable compared to the
234 null model $\chi^2 = 309.67$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.000$, $\Delta AIC = 307.6$, $\Delta BIC = 304$); C) Velocity profile of
235 fruit flies after entering a zone where relief is provided (yellow line) compared to the profile
236 (grey line) after entering the non-safe zone (number of observed velocities = 624637, lme
237 model with interaction between frame after entrance into one of the zones and specific
238 zone as explanatory variable compared to a model with only frame after entrance as
239 explanatory variable, $\chi^2 = 16688$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.000$, $\Delta AIC > 10^4$, $\Delta BIC > 10^4$); D) density
240 plots describing the residency of flies during training session, while optogenetic stimulation
241 is triggered if flies leave the safe zone (squared). The plot on the left describes the
242 residency of flies when the safe zone is at the southern end (during odd numbered trials)
243 of the arena, the right one when the safe zone is at the northern-end.

244

245 **Figure 2. Distribution of flies in the two zones before and after the onset of**
246 **optogenetic stimulation.**

247 We subdivided the 660 frames (60 seconds) time window considered into 6 identical
248 periods of 10 seconds each (from frame 330 to frame 440, from 440 to 550 etc.). The
249 green bar represents the 30 seconds of visual pattern display, without optogenetic
250 stimulation, the red bar marks the half-minute during which optogenetic is triggered
251 according to fly position in the arena. For each 10 second period we computed the mean
252 of the observed values of the y-variables later explained. Pointrange represents the mean
253 and the confidence interval around the mean. A) Mean number of flies for each period
254 considered, divided according to the zone considered. The number of fruit flies in the
255 previous safe zone (matched to the horizontal stripe) decreases after the onset of

256 optogenetic stimulation in favour of an increase in the number of flies in the current safe
257 zone (matched to the vertical stripe). The mean number of fruit flies inside each zone
258 depends on the zone itself (whether it is providing relief or not) and its interaction with the
259 period of time considered (number of observations = 179, generalised linear mixed-model
260 (glmm) with zone and period interaction as explanatory variable compared to only zone
261 model $\chi^2 = 83.47$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.000$, $\Delta AIC = 81.5$, $\Delta BIC = 78.3$). This result is independent
262 from the trial in which flies are counted (the best glmm is a null model), suggesting there is
263 no change as the training progresses; B) The time fruit flies spend in the zones depends
264 on the zone considered and its interaction with the progression of time (number of
265 observations = 3527, lme with zone and period interaction as explanatory variables when
266 compared to a model with only zone as the explanatory variable $\chi^2 = 174.88$, $df = 1$, $p =$
267 $.000$, $\Delta AIC = 173$, $\Delta BIC = 167$). In this case a significant role is played by the progression
268 of training, since flies, as expected, improve their learning (number of observations =
269 3527, lme with interaction between zone and trial as explanatory variables, when
270 compared to a model with only zone as the explanatory variable $\chi^2 = 10.14$, $df = 1$, $p =$
271 0.001 , $\Delta AIC = 9$, $\Delta BIC = 2$); C) Mean number of visits to the two zones throughout the
272 whole training period is a function of the interaction between each zone and the period of
273 time considered (number of observations = 1504, generalised linear mixed-model (glmm)
274 with zone and period interaction as explanatory variable compared to a model with only
275 zone as explanatory $\chi^2 = 67.66$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.000$, $\Delta AIC = 65.6$, $\Delta BIC = 60.4$). Zone alone
276 is not a good predictor of the number of visits, suggesting that there is no difference
277 between the number of visits to the two zones, suggesting that flies search within both
278 zones in the same measure during the time period considered (when a model with zone as
279 the explanatory variable is compared to a null model, there's no significant difference
280 between the two models, number of observations = 1504, $\chi^2 = 0.001$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.96$); D)
281 Density plots of the spatial distributions of flies before the onset of optogenetic stimulation

282 (higher row) and during the stimulation (lower row) when the safe zone is located at the
283 northern-end of the arena. Fruit flies are aggregated within the previous safe zone in the
284 first 10 seconds after the visual stimuli are displayed (440, representing the period of time
285 from frame 330 to frame 440), in the following two periods they begin to scatter throughout
286 the whole arena, and since optogenetic stimulation is delivered according to the position of
287 the flies (770), flies start to aggregate in the safe zone. E) As in D), but when the safe zone
288 is located at the southern-end of the arena.

289

290 **Figure 3. Some flies return to the previous safe zone at the onset of optogenetic**
291 **stimulation**

292 Subsetting of periods was performed as described in the caption to Figure 2. Pointrange
293 represents the mean and the confidence interval around the mean. We subdivided the flies
294 into two groups: one consisting in flies which at frame 661 (when the optogenetic
295 stimulation starts) which are already inside the previous safe zone and another consisting
296 in flies which are outside both the previous safe zone and the current safe zone. A) The
297 mean number of flies that are already inside the previous safe zone (blue point range) at
298 the onset of the stimulation remains stable during the first 10 seconds of stimulation; Some
299 of the flies that were outside both zones at frame 661 (orange point range) return to the
300 previous safe zone (number of observations = 180, generalised linear mixed-model (glmm)
301 with the interaction of fly group and period as the explanatory variables compared to a
302 model with only fly group as the predictor $\chi^2 = 39.43$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$, $\Delta AIC = 37.5$, ΔBIC
303 $= 34.3$). This result is independent from the trial in which flies are counted (the best glmm
304 is a null model), suggesting there is no change as the training progresses (i.e.
305 independence from learning). A model with only group as the explanatory variable is better
306 than a null model (electronic supplementary material, table S1), suggesting there is also a
307 difference between the two groups of flies independently from the period of time B) The

308 time fruit flies spend in the previous safe zone depends on the zone considered and its
309 interaction with the progression of time (number of observations = 4232, lme with
310 interaction between group and time as explanatory variables when compared to a model
311 with only zone as the explanatory variable $\chi^2 = 220.19$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.000$, $\Delta AIC = 218$,
312 $\Delta BIC = 212$). In this case the progression of training is not significant, suggesting that this
313 effect is not affected by learning. C) Mean number of visits to the previous safe zone
314 throughout the whole training session is a function of the interaction between each group
315 of flies and the period of time considered, with no effect due to the progression of training
316 (number of observations = 1082, generalised linear mixed-model (glmm) with the
317 interaction between group and period as explanatory variables compared to a model with
318 only group as the explanatory variable ($\chi^2 = 10.3$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.001$, $\Delta AIC = 8.3$, $\Delta BIC =$
319 3.3); D) Density plots of flies already inside the previous safe zone in the 10-second-period
320 before the onset of stimulation (660) and in the following 10 seconds (770), when the safe
321 zone is at the northern-end (left) or at southern-end (right). In both cases the flies quickly
322 spread away from the previous safe zone; E) As in D), but in this case the group of flies
323 which are outside the previous safe zone at frame 661 are represented; F) superimposition
324 of the density plots shown in D) and E)

325

326 **Figure 4. Fruit flies which are initially outside the two zones, equally distribute to**
327 **either of the two zones soon after optogenetic stimulus onset**

328 Subdivision of periods as described in the caption to figure 2. Pointrange represents the
329 mean and the confidence interval around the mean. A) Mean number of fruit flies, which
330 are initially outside both zones and that at the onset of optogenetic stimulation (at frame
331 661), then populate the two zones. In the 10-second-period after the onset of optogenetic
332 stimulation (770), an approximately equal number of flies enters into either the previous
333 safe zone or the current safe zone. Thus the difference between the number of flies that

334 approach either one of the two zones is not significant (number of observations = 180,
335 generalised linear mixed-model (glmm) with zone and period interaction as explanatory
336 variable compared to a model with only zone as the predictor $\chi^2 = 205.43$, $df = 1$, $p =$
337 0.000 , $\Delta AIC = 203.4$, $\Delta BIC = 200.2$); B) Mean number of visits to the zones throughout the
338 whole training session is a function of the interaction between zone and the period of time
339 considered, with no effect due to the progression of training (number of observations =
340 1392, generalised linear mixed-model (glmm) with the interaction between zone and
341 period as the explanatory variables compared to a model with only group as the predictor
342 ($\chi^2 = 67.88$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.000$, $\Delta AIC = 65.9$, $\Delta BIC = 60.7$). Zone alone is not a good
343 predictor of the number of visits, suggesting that there is no difference between the
344 number of visits to the two zones, suggesting that flies search both zones in the same
345 measure (when a model with zone as the explanatory variable is compared to a null
346 model, there's no significant difference between the two models; number of observations =
347 1392, $\chi^2 = 1.26$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.26$).

348

349 **Figure 5. Spatial dependence of the choice of the first zone**

350 A) Spatial distribution at frame 661 (when the first pulse of optogenetic stimulation is
351 delivered) of fruit flies which will then approach the horizontal stripe, thus entering the
352 previous safe zone first, during trials in which this is found at the southern-end of the
353 arena; B) Marcon and Peuch M's function value represents the number of observed flies at
354 each distance from a single fly (radius) compared to the expected values from a random
355 distribution (red dashed line, grey shading represent the envelope built on 10.000
356 simulations of random distributions). A value greater than 1 suggests aggregation. A
357 goodness-of-fit test of the observed data reveals that flies are significantly more
358 aggregated than expected (number of observations = 277, $p = 0.000$); C) Spatial
359 distribution at frame 661 of fruit flies which will approach the vertical stripe, thus entering

360 the safe zone first; D) M function value is significantly greater than expected under the null
361 hypothesis (number of observations = 256, $p = 0.000$) suggesting spatial aggregation of
362 flies; E) M function value assessing whether the two distributions of flies reported in A) and
363 C) actually consist of two distinct aggregates. An M function value < 1 suggests that
364 spatial repulsion between the two groups of flies (number of observations = 533, $p =$
365 0.000), indicating that flies which will enter the current safe zone are spatially segregated
366 from flies which will enter the previous safe zone; F) Spatial distribution of fruit flies at
367 frame 661 which will approach the horizontal stripe, thus entering the previous safe zone
368 first, located at the northern-end of the arena. G) Goodness-of-fit of observed data
369 suggests that flies are more spatially aggregated than expected, as seen in B) (number of
370 observations = 229, $p = 0.000$); H) Spatial distribution of fruit flies at frame 661 which will
371 approach the vertical stripe, thus entering the safe zone first; I) Goodness-of-fit of
372 observed data suggests that flies are more spatially aggregated than expected (number of
373 observations = 209, $p = 0.000$); L) M function value assessing whether the two
374 distributions of flies reported in F) and H) actually represent two distinct aggregates. A
375 goodness-of-fit test suggests spatial repulsion between the two groups of flies (number of
376 observations = 438, $p = 0.000$), indicating that flies which will enter the safe zone are
377 spatially segregated from flies which will enter the previous safe zone, thus supporting the
378 hypotheses that spatial location is a predictor of which zone is explored first;

379

380 **CRedit authorship contribution statement Nicola Meda** Conceptualization,
381 Methodology, Data acquisition, Formal analysis, Visualization, Data curation, Writing -
382 original draft, Writing - review & editing. **Giulio M. Menti** Methodology, Data acquisition,
383 Writing - review & editing **Aram Megighian** Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing -
384 review & editing **Mauro A. Zordan** Conceptualization, Methodology, Software, Writing -
385 review & editing

386

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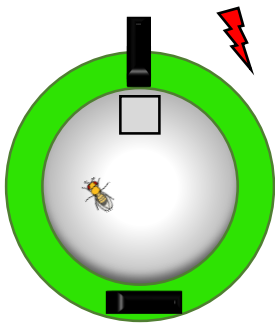
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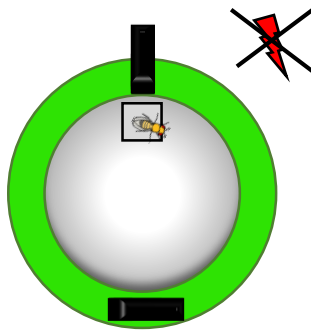
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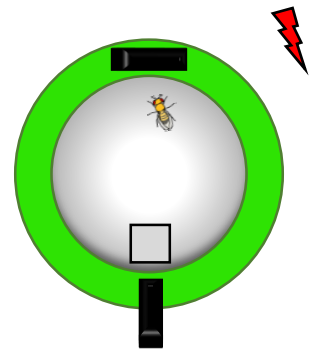
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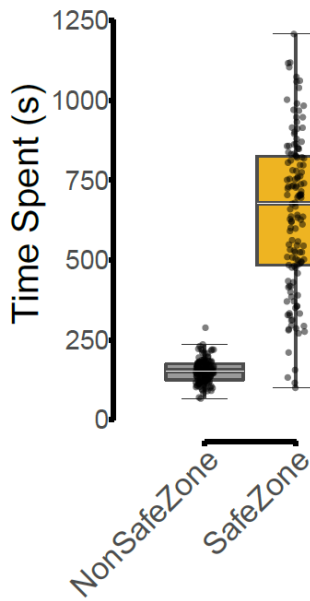
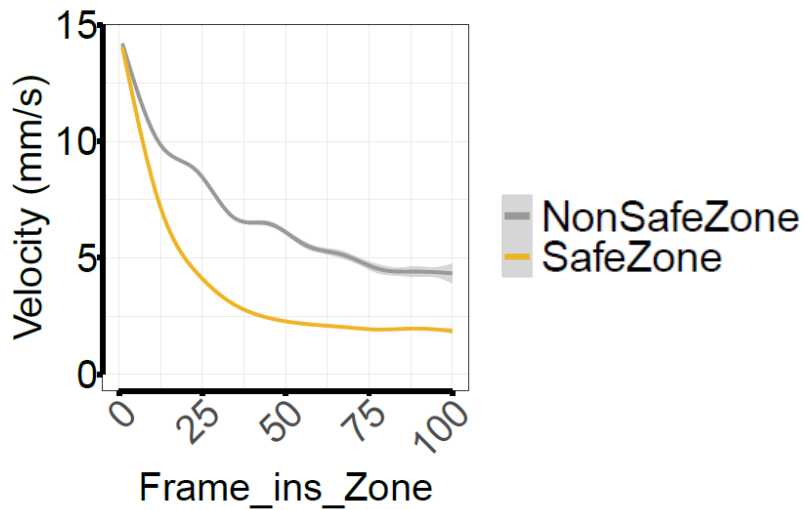
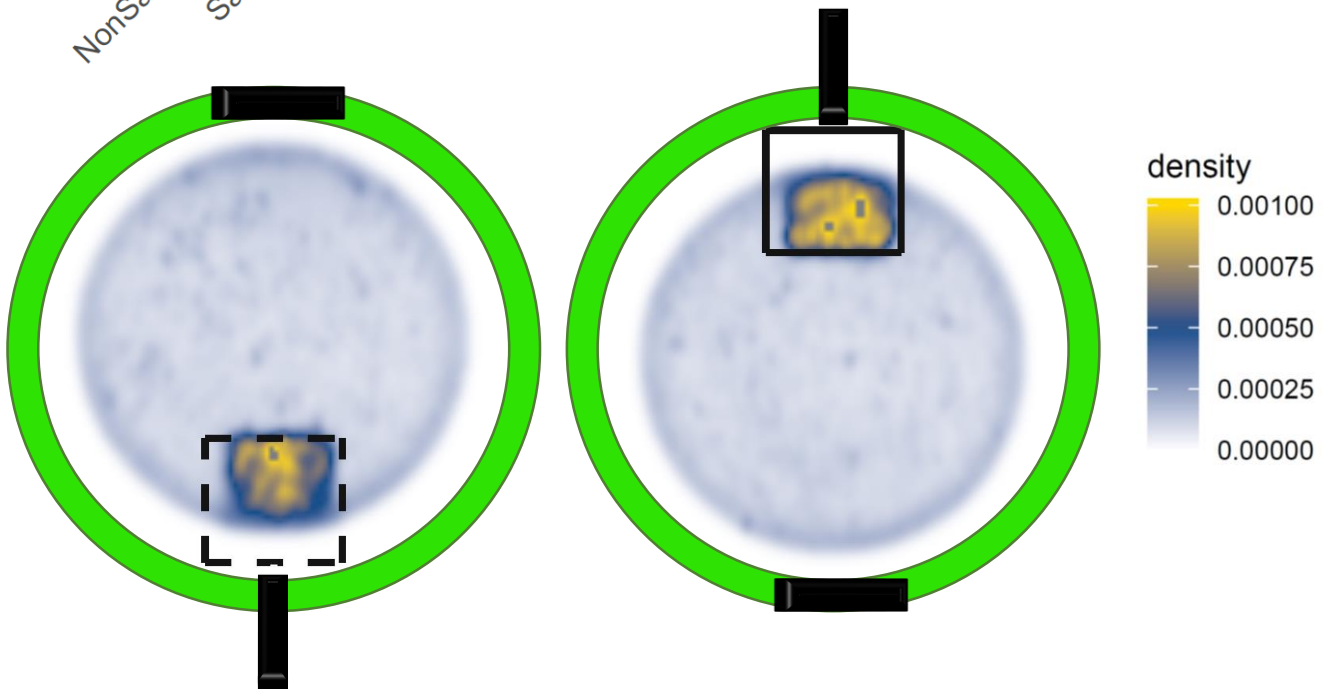
Optogenetic stimulation depends on the fly's position in the arena. The safe zone is marked by a black vertical stripe



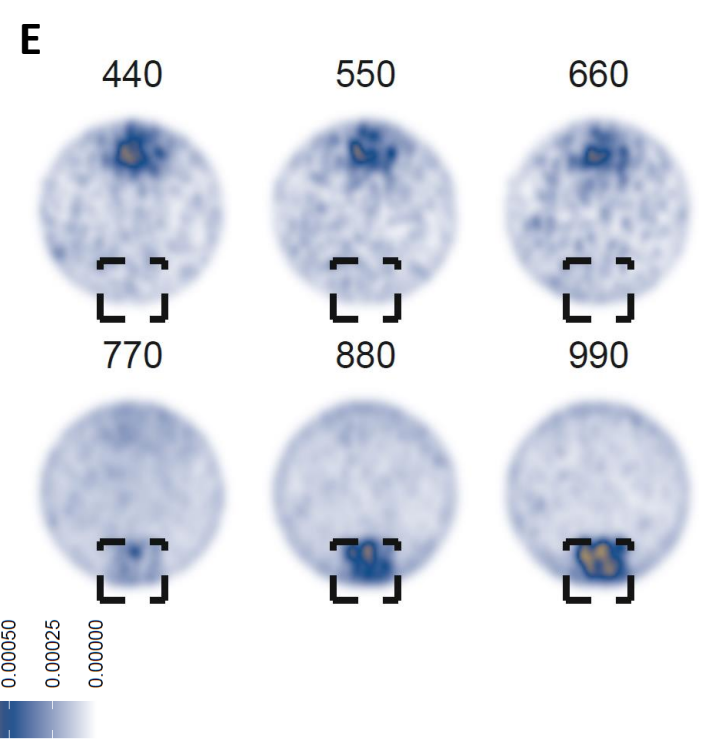
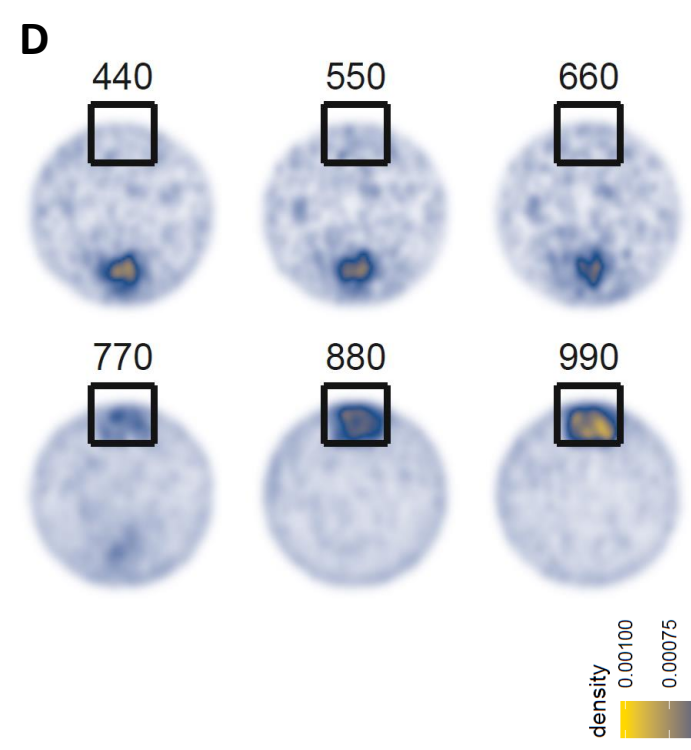
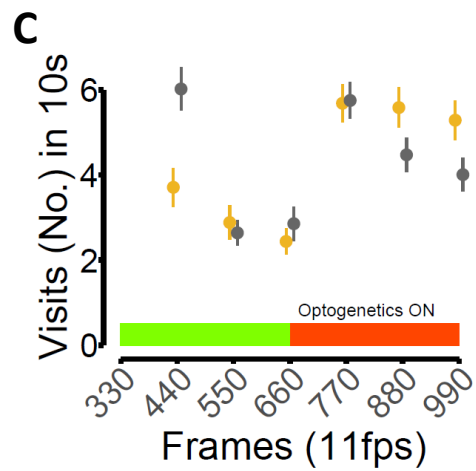
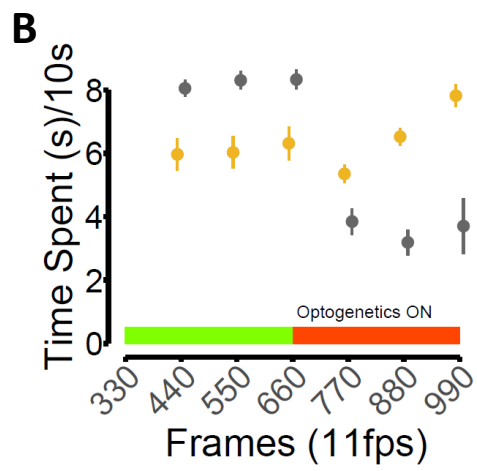
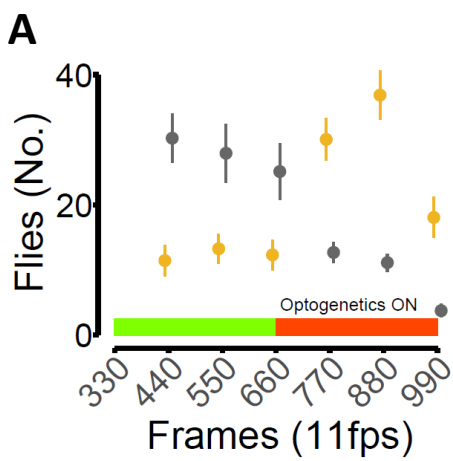
When the fly stays in the safe zone, stimulation ceases. The next trial the safe zone – vertical stripe match will be moved on the opposite side of the arena

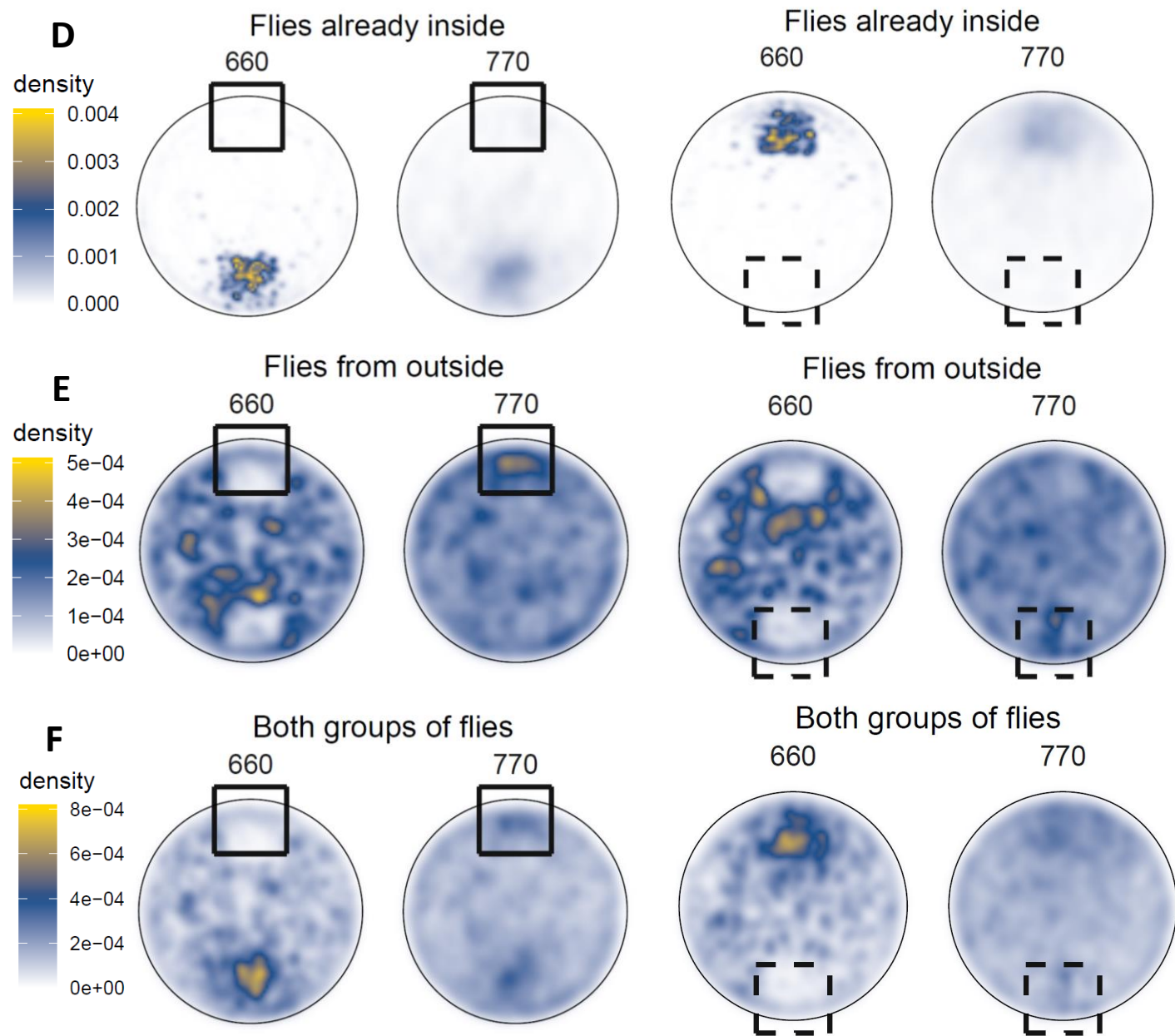
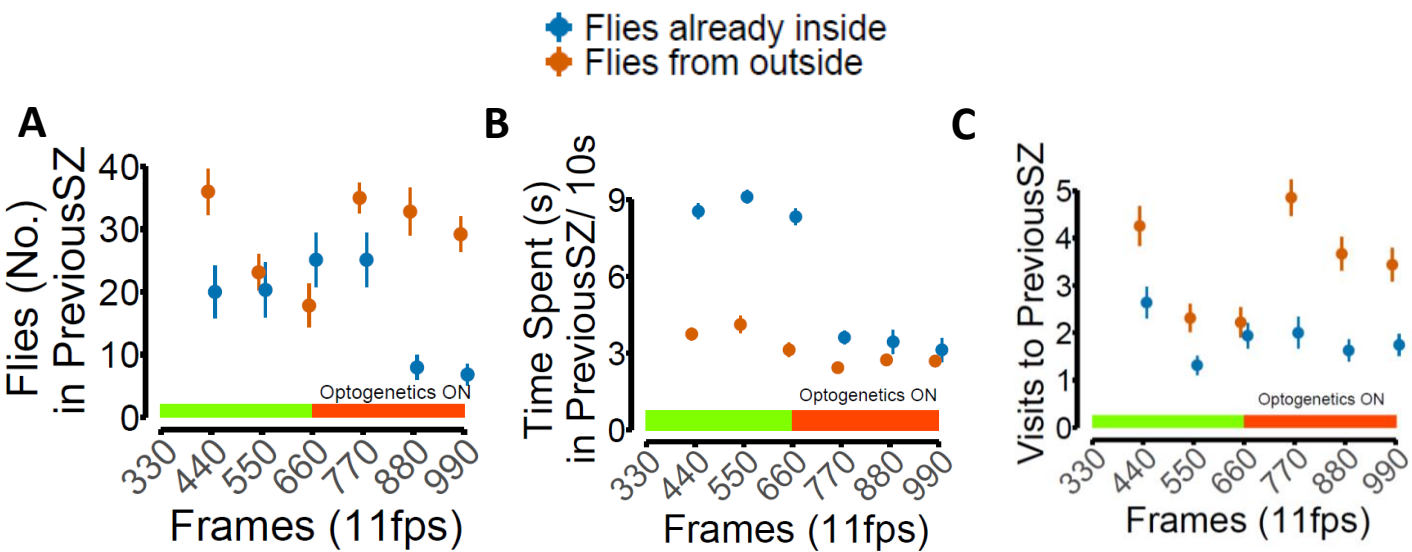


At the beginning of a new trial, does the fly perform local search to stop the bitter stimulation or is its searching behaviour immediately directed towards the vertical stripe?

B**C****D**

● PreviousSafeZone
◆ SafeZone





Flies from outside of both zones

