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Pi USB Cam: A simple and affordable DIY solution that enables high-quality, high-throughput video capture for behavioral neuroscience research

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5
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49 **ABSTRACT**

50 Video recording is essential for behavioral neuroscience research, but the majority of available
51 systems suffer from poor cost-to-functionality ratio. Commercial options frequently come at high
52 financial cost that prohibits scalability and throughput, whereas DIY solutions often require
53 significant expertise and time investment unaffordable to many researchers. To address this, we
54 combined a low-cost Raspberry Pi microcomputer, DIY electronics peripherals, freely available
55 open-source firmware, and custom 3D printed casings to create Pi USB Cam, a simple yet
56 powerful and highly versatile video recording solution. Pi USB Cam is constructed using
57 affordable and widely available components and requires no expertise to build and implement.
58 The result is a system that functions as a plug-and-play USB camera that can be easily installed
59 in various animal testing and housing sites and is readily compatible with popular behavioral
60 and neural recording software. Here, we provide a comprehensive parts list and step-by-step
61 instructions for users to build and implement their own Pi USB Cam system. In a series of
62 benchmark comparisons, Pi USB Cam was able to capture ultra-wide fields of view of behaving
63 rats given limited object distance and produced high image quality while maintaining consistent
64 frame rates even under low- and no-light conditions relative to a standard, commercially
65 available USB camera. Video recordings were easily scaled using free, open-source software.
66 Altogether, Pi USB Cam presents an elegant yet simple solution for behavioral neuroscientists
67 seeking an affordable and highly flexible system to enable quality video recordings.

68 **SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENT**

69 Video capture is increasingly necessary for neuroscience research where neural and behavioral
70 data are synchronized to reveal correlative and causal relationships. This relies on a recording
71 system that can capture quality videos without significant alterations to pre-existing
72 experimental conditions (e.g., lighting, space, etc.), enables easy online and offline analysis by
73 commonly used software, and offers high scalability to increase throughput. However, the high
74 cost and poor flexibility of commercially available options leave the role of an ideal video
75 recording system unfulfilled. Here, we present a DIY video recording solution that combines
76 affordable electronics hardware and custom 3D printed components with sophisticated open-
77 source software to make a simple, yet powerful USB camera that satisfies almost any recording
78 need.

79 **INTRODUCTION**

80 Video recorded data is a crucial component of behavioral neuroscience research. While
81 a number of commercially available recording solutions exist, few, if any, satisfy all or most of
82 the needs of a typical laboratory. Many behavioral assays, particularly those intended for use
83 with nocturnal species, are conducted under low- or no-light conditions to mimic the portion of
84 the circadian cycle during which animals are the most active. Therefore, an ideal video
85 recording system enables video acquisition under both ambient and infrared (IR) illumination.
86 Moreover, spatial limitations imposed by testing apparatuses frequently require capture of a
87 large field of view from a relatively short object distance. Although some commercially available
88 options designed specifically for behavioral neuroscience research meet these criteria, they are
89 often expensive and unique to a specific testing apparatus limiting scalability and flexibility of
90 use. Given these limitations, researchers frequently repurpose commercial USB webcams for
91 video acquisition because of their affordability and accessibility. However, webcams are rarely
92 intended for recording under low- to no-light conditions, nor for capturing a large field of view
93 under circumstances when subjects are at a relatively short distance from the camera.

94 DIY solutions that make use of low-cost, single board microcomputers such as
95 Raspberry Pi have gained the attention of behavioral neuroscientists as laboratories attempt to
96 address the shortcomings of existing commercially available solutions. For example, Singh et al.
97 (2019) developed a powerful web-based interface for long duration, remote video recording and
98 streaming. However, lack of active maintenance and development quickly rendered it obsolete
99 as the current generation of Raspberry Pi board (4B) no longer supports the legacy OS
100 (Raspbian Stretch) for which it was developed. Recently developed solutions that use the
101 Raspberry Pi Camera in its most basic form to acquire video are less demanding in terms of
102 debugging and updating (Saxena et al., 2018; Weber and Fisher, 2019; Clemensson et al.,
103 2020; Centanni and Smith, 2021). However, these out-of-the-box options suffer from limited
104 functionality, often lacking the capacity to live preview and record at the same time, or interface

105 with closed-loop behavioral control systems. As a result, DIY solutions frequently require a
106 degree of programming knowledge to properly configure and adapt the system to specific
107 research needs thereby limiting broad application of such systems by novice users. Thus,
108 drawbacks associated with both commercially available and DIY video capture solutions pose
109 significant limitations to easy acquisition of video recorded behavioral data.

110 To address this gap, we designed a versatile, low-cost, DIY video recording solution that
111 requires no specialized expertise or equipment. The Pi USB Cam is low-/no-light compatible
112 and accepts a variety of wide-angle lenses. The system utilizes open-source, actively
113 maintained software that enables true plug-and-play capability. Combined with custom 3D-
114 printed components and freely available open-source video acquisition software, this system
115 offers highly versatile implementation and scalability across numerous behavioral testing
116 conditions. Here, we provide detailed step-by-step instructions for hardware and software setup
117 and demonstrate its ease of use and superiority in terms of field of view and low-light recording
118 over commercial counterparts.

119 **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

120 **Build the camera**

121 Pi USB Cam is comprised of a Raspberry Pi board (Raspberry Pi, Cambridge,
122 Cambridge, UK) and a wide-angle day-night vision camera (Arducam Technology Co., Limited,
123 Hong Kong, China). This camera comes equipped with a motorized IR-CUT filter that is
124 automatically triggered based on ambient light intensity to accommodate for both bright-light
125 and low-/no-light recording, as well as an out-of-the-box 170° [Diagonal FOV] x 140° [Horizontal
126 FOV] fisheye lens. The camera uses a 5MP OV5647 sensor, which can support up to 30 frames
127 per second (FPS) at 1080p when used with the suggested firmware. Additionally, the camera
128 comes attached with two 850 nm infrared LEDs to facilitate image acquisition in low-/no-light
129 conditions.

130 We selected the Raspberry Pi 4 Model B to run the camera, which was the latest release
131 of the main product line at the time of publication. This model and the more affordable and
132 compact Raspberry Pi Zero are readily supported by *Show-me webcam*, an open-source
133 firmware that enables a Raspberry Pi connected camera to be booted as a simple USB camera.
134 While both models are compatible as the base hardware for building a Pi USB Cam, we chose
135 Pi 4B over Zero due to its added processing power, which is significantly more advantageous if
136 the Pi board were to be repurposed for GUI applications. Of note, while the Raspberry Pi Zero 2
137 was recently released, it is not yet supported by *Show-me webcam*, although this is likely to
138 change in near future. Legacy boards like Pi 3+ and earlier releases that are no longer widely
139 accessible for purchase are not supported by *Show-me webcam*.

140 A complete list of store-bought components is provided in **Table 1** with a more
141 comprehensive list including alternative options provided in **Extended Table 1-1**.

142

143 **Step-by-step instructions**

144 *Software installation*

- 145 1. Insert a clean micro-SD card with a minimum storage of 64MB into your computer (**Figure**
146 **1A**).
- 147 2. Download the latest release of the *Show-me webcam* image file to your computer from the
148 developer's GitHub page <https://github.com/showmewebcam/showmewebcam> (**Figure 1B**).
149 Make note to download the image file corresponding to the appropriate Raspberry Pi board
150 model.
- 151 3. Download, install, and launch the official Raspberry Pi Imager from
152 <https://www.raspberrypi.com/software/> (**Figure 1C**). Inside the imager's main interface, click
153 on **CHOOSE OS** followed by **Use custom** to locate the image file you just downloaded
154 (**Figures 1C1-2**). Then, click on **CHOOSE STORAGE** and select the clean micro-SD card
155 (**Figures 1C3-4**). Lastly, click on **WRITE** followed by **YES** on the pop-up warning to flash
156 the *Show-me webcam* image file into the micro-SD card (**Figures 1C5-6**).

157

158 *Hardware Assembly*

- 159 1. Gather the essential hardware components shown in **Figure 2A** and appropriate housings if
160 desired for the Pi board (**Table 1**) and camera (**Table 2**).
- 161 OPTIONAL: If you intend to use the camera for low-/no-light recording close to a reflective
162 surface such as plexiglass, we recommend removing the IR LEDs that come attached to
163 the camera module (**Figure 2B**) at this stage. Doing so will allow for flexible LED placement
164 thereby enabling the user to avoid flaring artifacts in the captured image (**Figure 4A**). For
165 more information on how to use and position LEDs independently from the camera refer to
166 “**IR LED Setup**” and see **Figure 4**.
- 167 2. To connect the camera module to the Pi board, first locate the camera ribbon cable ports on
168 the camera module and the Pi board, as indicated in **Figure 2C1**. Gently lift the black
169 plastic clip on the ports. Insert the ribbon cable terminal making sure that the silver leads on

170 the cable face the contacts inside the port. Push down the plastic clip to secure the ribbon
171 cable in place (**Figure 2C2**).

172 3. Insert the micro-SD card prepared in *Software Installation* into the micro-SD card slot on the
173 back of the Pi board to finish the setup (**Figure 2D**).

174 4. To power up and start using the Pi USB Cam, connect it to a host computer via its USB-C
175 port using a USB cable (**Figure 2E1**). The red built-in LED should stay lit to indicate that it
176 is receiving adequate power supply (**Figure 2E2**). The green built-in LED will fast blink
177 three times after booting, which will take around 5 seconds, to indicate that the Pi USB Cam
178 is ready for use. This LED will remain illuminated when the Pi USB Cam is in active use
179 (**Figure 2E2**).

180 5. You can optionally house the Pi USB Cam in our custom 3D-printed camera case for
181 protection and use mount tools for easy installation in a variety of behavioral testing
182 configurations (**Figures 2F, 9-11**). STL files and print instructions can be found at our
183 Thingiverse page: <https://www.thingiverse.com/gloverlab/designs>.

184 NOTE: The STL files provided can be readily sliced by popular slicing software and printed
185 with consumer-grade 3D printers or commercial pay-to-print service offered by universities
186 and elsewhere. For an estimated cost of printing a full set of our camera and IR LED
187 holders using either printing options, see **Extended Table 1-2**.

188

189 **Adjusting camera settings**

190 The Arducam day-night vision camera module that we suggest using here has an on-
191 board photoresistor (**Figure 3A1**) that senses ambient light intensity. This allows for automatic
192 control of the IR filter to enable IR sensitivity under low-/no-light conditions (**Figure 3B**) and
193 improve color accuracy under bright light conditions (**Figure 3C**). However, in scenarios where
194 lighting conditions change dramatically within a single recording or approach the ambient light
195 threshold, one might consider manually disabling the motorized IR filter to prevent automatic IR

196 filter shuttering and keep it in either a permanent ON or OFF state throughout the entire
197 recording session. Covering the photoresistor with non-translucent tape will prevent ambient
198 light from reaching the sensor thereby enabling IR sensitivity by permanently turning the IR filter
199 OFF (**Figure 3A1**). Conversely, to manually enable IR correction, the IR filter can permanently
200 be switched ON by unplugging the motorized IR filter connector from the back of the camera
201 board (**Figure 3A2**).

202 Camera software settings such as brightness and white balance can also be readily
203 adjusted to suit specific recording needs, such as improving the image color when recording
204 under low-light conditions (**Figure 3B**). Users can access camera setting parameters by
205 interfacing the Pi USB Cam with a host computer. The following protocol (adapted from
206 <https://tutorial.cytron.io/2020/12/29/raspberry-pi-zero-usb-webcam/>) describes how to access
207 and adjust camera setting parameters on a Windows PC using an open-source software called
208 PuTTY (**Figure 3G**), which allows the PC to establish a serial connection with Pi USB Cam. The
209 same can be accomplished on a Linux or Mac computer via command line (visit the official
210 debugging guide for more: <https://github.com/showmewebcam/showmewebcam>).

211

212 **Step-by-step instructions**

213 1. To identify which USB serial communication (COM) port on your host PC the Pi USB
214 Cam is using, open **Device Manager** and locate the COM port number of the camera
215 under **Port (COM & LPT)** (**Figure 3E**).

216 NOTE: If you have more than one USB serial device connected to your computer, you
217 can disconnect and then reconnect Pi USB Cam while monitoring hardware changes in
218 **Device Manager** to confirm which COM port is used by which camera.

219 2. Download, install, and launch PuTTY from <https://www.putty.org>. To establish a serial
220 connection with the Pi USB Cam, first make sure that **Session** is selected under
221 **Category** (**Figure 3F1**). Then set **Connection type** to **Serial** (**Figure 3F2**), enter the

222 COM port number of the camera under **Serial line (Figure 3F3)**, and set **Speed** to
223 **112800 (Figure 3F4)**. Click **Open** to log into the Pi USB Cam (**Figure 3F5**).

224 3. Once logged in, type the following command `/usr/bin/camera-ctl` and press **Enter**
225 to launch the **camera-ctl** interface and show all adjustable camera setting parameters
226 (**Figure 3G**). These can be adjusted during live preview to see how any changes affect
227 image quality.

228 OPTIONAL: We recommend setting **Video Bitrate** to **Maximum (25000000)**, and **Auto**
229 **Exposure, White Balance, and ISO Sensitivity Auto** to **Manual (Figure 3G2)**, to
230 improve the image coloring under low-light conditions (**Figure 3B**). We also set
231 **Brightness** to **53** for all low-light recordings used in this paper. For recording under
232 bright-light conditions, consider reverting **White Balance** to the default **Auto** to improve
233 color accuracy (**Figure 3C**). However, we encourage experimenting with the setting as it
234 likely varies with the recording condition and recording devices.

235 4. Once finished, press **S** to save the changes in the camera setting parameters, or revert
236 back to default by pressing **D** (resets individual setting to default) or **R** (resets all settings
237 to default). To terminate the serial connection, first press **Q** to quit the **camera-ctl**
238 interface, and then close the PuTTY session window.

239 5. To adjust the focus on the camera lens, first loosen the screw that secures the lens
240 firmly inside the M12 lens holder, as indicated in **Figure 3H**, then simply turn the lens
241 clockwise or counterclockwise while monitoring the camera preview until the image
242 becomes sharp.

243

244 **IR LED setup**

245 IR-sensitive cameras need to be coupled with adequate IR illumination to produce high-
246 quality images in low-/no-light conditions. The wide-angle day-night vision camera from
247 Arducam that we suggest using in this configuration comes with two 850nm IR LEDs attached

248 and powered by the camera board (**Figure 2B**). However, recording through reflective surfaces
249 such as plexiglass across short object distances (e.g., operant box) caused undesirable flare
250 artifacts in the field of view (**Figure 4A**). To circumvent this, we removed the LED boards from
251 the main camera board and powered them independently using a pair of 3v3 power and ground
252 pins on the Raspberry Pi board (**Extended Figure 2-1**). This allowed LED placement
253 independent of the camera enabling even and high-quality illumination of the area of interest
254 (**Figures 4B-C**). This section describes the steps to wire two 850nm LEDs in parallel using
255 custom-made jumper cables and power them with the Pi board itself (**Figures 4D-G**).

256

257 NOTE: The 3v3 power pin of the Pi board can safely provide up to 500mA of current (according
258 to: https://pinout.xyz/pinout/3v3_power). Exceeding that limit using high-power LEDs may cause
259 a “brownout” of the Pi and potential safety concerns. Our testing indicated that the two IR LED
260 boards that came with the Arducam day-night vision camera draw $\leq 200\text{mA}$ of current from the
261 3v3 pin when connected in parallel. For higher power LEDs, it is recommended to use either the
262 5v power pin, which provides a higher current draw of about 1.5A (according to:
263 https://pinout.xyz/pinout/5v_power), or an external battery pack or power supply unit. For
264 alternative LED options and related hardware, see **Extended Table 1-1**.

265

266 **Step-by-step instructions**

267 1. Following the step where the LED boards were taken off from the main camera board
268 (**Figure 2B**), cut three segments of 22-gauge Red-Black electrical wire (**Figure 4D**): **(1)**
269 a short ~3 cm wire to connect the two LED boards in parallel; **(2)** a long ~80 cm wire
270 (adjust to specific installation requirements) for connecting the LED unit to the Pi board
271 located some distance from the camera; **(3)** a short ~6 cm wire to connect wire **(2)** to a
272 pair of 3v3 power and ground pins on the Pi board.

- 273 2. Split wire **(1)** down the middle into two separate red and black wires. Split one end of
274 wires **(2)** and **(3)** by ~3 cm and the other end of each ~1 cm.
- 275 3. Crimp the appropriate electrical connectors to the stripped wires as shown in **Figure 4D**
- 276 a. Install two non-insulated ring connectors on either end of wire **(1)**.
- 277 b. Install two ring connectors on the end of wire **(2)** separated by ~3 cm and two
278 male pin connectors housed in one 1x2 plastic housing on the other end.
- 279 c. Install two female pin connectors each housed in 1x1 plastic housings on the end
280 of wire **(3)** separated by ~3 cm and two female pin connectors housed in one 1x2
281 plastic housing on the other end.

282 NOTE: For detailed instructions on how to crimp ring and pin type connectors, see
283 **Extended Figures 4-1 & 4-2**.

- 284 4. Wire the LED boards in parallel as shown in **Figure 4E** and **Figure 4F1**.

285 NOTE: Red wires are used for power (+) and black wires for ground (-). Make sure the
286 polarities of all components align before completing the circuit.

- 287 a. Secure the ring connectors on wires **(1)** and **(2)** to the LED boards using the
288 screws that came with camera module.
- 289 b. Mate the two female pin connectors on wire **(3)** to any pair of 3v3 power and
290 ground pins on the Pi board 40-pin header (e.g., pins 1 and 6 as shown in **Figure**
291 **4E**).
- 292 c. Connect wires **(2)** and **(3)** via their respective pin connectors to complete the
293 circuit.

294 Test functionality by powering up the Pi USB Cam and confirming that the LED unit is
295 illuminated under low-/no-light conditions.

- 296 5. Install heat sinks on the back of the LED boards to prevent overheating (**Figure 4F**).
- 297 Optionally house the fully wired LED unit in the custom 3D-printed case and install the

298 fully assembled unit in any behavioral testing site using the 3D-printed mount tools
299 **(Figure 4G)**.

300

301 **Multi-camera video acquisition**

302 Pi USB Cam affords a high degree of scalability that is often desired for high throughput
303 experiments. Use of the freely available, open-source video acquisition software, OBS (Open
304 Broadcaster Software) Studio enables preview of live video feeds on screen for real-time
305 behavioral monitoring, live-stream video feeds over internet, and simultaneous video acquisition
306 from multiple camera sources into separate local files for offline behavioral analysis. OBS studio
307 is compatible with all three major operating systems; however, we recommend using a Windows
308 PC as the host computer due to added functionalities including video configuration settings that
309 are not available on other platforms. Scalability is limited only by the hardware of the host
310 computer (e.g., number of USB controllers / ports, sufficient CPU, etc). We recommend using a
311 Windows desktop that allows for add-on USB PCIe expansion cards to provide additional USB
312 controllers and greater bandwidth for multi-camera recordings.

313 The following protocol describes how to set up OBS Studio on a Windows desktop for
314 multi-Pi USB Cam video recordings. For streaming over network, adding audio recording, and
315 many more applications, users can visit the OBS Wiki at <https://obsproject.com/wiki/>. Note that
316 unless otherwise stated all videos and snapshots of videos included in Figures were acquired at
317 480p and 30 FPS using OBS Studio.

318

319 **Step-by-step instructions**

- 320 1. Connect one or more Pi USB Cams to a host Windows desktop that is optionally
321 installed with USB PCIe expansion cards for added USB bandwidth **(Figure 5A)**.
- 322 2. To make sure that your multi-camera configuration will not exceed the USB bandwidth
323 during recording, open **Device Manager**, click **View** followed by **Devices by**

324 **connection**, and confirm that no more than three Pi USB Cams are connected to each
325 **Host Controller (Figure 5B)**.

326 3. Download, install, and launch the latest release of OBS Studio from:
327 <https://obsproject.com> (Figure 5C).

328 NOTE: The default user interface can be customized under the **View** menu to hide
329 unnecessary features such as the **Audio Mixer** and **Scene Transitions**.

330 4. Users can create one or more “profiles” that can save any set of customized recording
331 settings. To do this, go to the **Profile** menu, and click **New (Figure 5D1)**. In the pop-up
332 window, enter a name for the new profile (e.g., “480p30fps” to reflect the recording
333 resolution and frame rate that will be updated in step 5), uncheck the auto-configuration
334 wizard, and click **OK** to finish creating the new profile (Figure 5D2). Once a profile is
335 selected, any changes in recording settings will be automatically saved under that
336 profile.

337 NOTE: One convenient way to use the “profile” feature is to create one for each
338 experimental protocol that specifies its own recording needs and settings. Saved
339 settings for each specific protocol can be quickly applied before each recording session
340 by simply selecting the appropriate profile.

341 5. To customize recording settings, click **Settings** on the **Controls** panel (Figure 5D3) to
342 open the setting window. **Figures 5D4-6** highlight several changes to the OBS Studio
343 default settings that we recommend for behavior recordings. Click **OK** to save any
344 changes to the recording settings and to close the pop-up window (Figure 5D7).

345 6. In steps 6-9, we provide options to preview and record video from multiple video
346 sources. OBS Studio refers to content being broadcast at any given time as a “scene”
347 whereas a configuration of scenes and their respective video sources is referred to as a
348 “scene collection”. Users may want to select multiple scenes and/or scene collections
349 based on their video needs. For example, multiple video sources can be accommodated

350 within a single scene. This can allow for preview of multiple video sources in tandem.
351 Importantly, recordings in this configuration will include video from each source tiled
352 within a single file (**Extended Figure 6-1A**). Video from multiple sources can also be
353 previewed across separate scenes within a single scene collection. However, OBS
354 Studio is only able to record from one scene at any given time in a multiple scene
355 configuration like this (**Extended Figure 6-1B**). In instances when users want to record
356 video from multiple sources in tandem into separate files, we recommend running
357 multiple scene collections each with a single scene and video source in separate
358 instances of OBS Studio (**Extended Figure 6-1C**). To create one or more “scene
359 collections” that can save any set of “scenes” and “video sources”, go to the **Scene**
360 **Collection** menu, and click **New (Figure 6A1)**. In the pop-up window, enter a name
361 unique to your testing apparatus (e.g., “BOX1” for operant box 1) and click **OK** to finish
362 creating the new scene collection (**Figure 6A2**).

363 7. To add a video source to a scene collection, click on the **+** button on the **Sources** panel
364 (**Figure 6A3**), and select **Video Capture Device (Figure 6A4)**. In the pop-up window,
365 enter a name (e.g., “BOX1 cam” for operant box 1 camera) for the new video source,
366 and then click **OK (Figure 6A5)**. Once the “properties” window shows up, select the right
367 camera source under **Device**, make additional changes to the device settings, and click
368 **OK** to finish setting up the new video source (**Figure 6A6**).

369 8. Click **Start Recording** on the **Controls** panel to start recording and **Stop Recording** to
370 stop (**Figure 6A7**).

371 9. For multi-camera recording in high throughput experiments (e.g., involving multiple
372 subjects in separate testing sites), repeat **step 6-7** to create one “scene collection” for
373 each camera. Then, launch one more instance of OBS Studio for each additional
374 camera by double-clicking the desktop shortcut (**Figure 6B1**) followed by clicking
375 **Launch Anyway** on the pop-up warning (**Figure 6B2**). In each new instance, make sure

376 to select the “scene collection” that contains the correct camera source for the recording
377 site of interest (**Figure 6B3**). To confirm that the recording will not overload the computer
378 CPU, monitor the CPU usage of each individual instance of OBS Studio provided in the
379 lower right corner of the OBS interface (**Figure 6B4**) or in **Windows Task Manager**.

380

381 **Frame rate analysis**

382 Many neuroscience techniques, such as *in vivo* calcium imaging, combine video
383 recordings with optical signal to correlate behavioral events with neural activity. The potential for
384 dropped or duplicate frames, which we have experienced with commercially available USB
385 webcams, poses non-trivial challenges for offline data analysis in these kinds of experiments.
386 Recordings with dropped frames appear fast forward and have shorter duration during playback
387 by third-party media players, which often assume a nominal frame rate that is higher than the
388 actual frame rate achieved. Recordings with duplicate frames appear choppy, and thus have
389 lower temporal resolution than desired, despite the high frame rate achieved. Both issues result
390 in additional and unnecessary workload during post-processing in order to accurately align
391 behavioral and neural data. To evaluate the frame rate performance of Pi USB Cam, videos of
392 freely behaving adult male Long-Evans and Sprague Dawley rats were acquired from inside
393 separate operant boxes (MED Associates, St Albans, VT, USA) using a Pi USB Cam and a
394 generic commercial webcam (Logitech C930e webcam, Lausanne, Switzerland). Camera
395 performance was assessed under both red and white house light illumination.

396 For dropped frame analysis, Synapse (Tucker-Davis Technologies TDT, Alachua, FL,
397 USA), an acquisition platform commonly used in neuroscience research, was used to acquire
398 video recordings from both cameras simultaneously. Five videos of ~5 mins duration each were
399 captured into AVI format in each lighting condition from each camera at the maximum resolution
400 (640x480) and frame rate (20FPS) supported by Synapse. For each recording, the total number
401 of frames and timestamps of each frame were read from Synapse data block using MATLAB

402 TDTbin2mat function ([https://www.tdt.com/docs/sdk/offline-data-analysis/offline-data-
404 matlab/overview/](https://www.tdt.com/docs/sdk/offline-data-analysis/offline-data-
403 matlab/overview/)). For each video frame, Synapse stores two timestamps: one for the frame
405 onset and one for offset. The onset timestamp of the very last frame was taken as the recording
406 true frame rate achieved was calculated using the following equation:

$$407 \text{ true FPS} = \frac{\text{total frames}}{\text{recording length (s)}}$$

408 The total number of dropped frames was calculated as:

$$409 \text{ total dropped frames} = \text{target FPS} \times \text{recording length (s)} - 1 - \text{total frames}$$

410 The number of dropped frames per minute was calculated as:

$$411 \text{ dropped frames per min} = \frac{\text{total dropped frames}}{\text{recording length (s)}} \times 60$$

412 The video file length when played in third-party media players was calculated as:

$$413 \text{ video file length (s)} = \frac{\text{total frames}}{\text{target FPS}}$$

414 For duplicate frame analysis, OBS Studio was used to acquire five videos of ~5 mins
415 duration each into mp4 format in each lighting condition from each camera at 640x480
416 resolution and 30 FPS. Visual inspection of videos from each camera made clear that those
417 acquired with the commercial webcam contained abundant duplicate frames, whereas those
418 acquired with Pi USB Cam were essentially devoid of duplicate frames. To quantify this, a
419 custom MATLAB script was used to extract relevant information from each recording, including
420 the recording length and total number of frames, and to identify duplicate frames. Color video
421 files were first converted to grayscale and the frame-by-frame difference in grayscale intensity
422 was calculated for each pixel. Plotting the frequency distribution of maximum change in pixel
423 intensity revealed a bimodal distribution apparent only in videos acquired with the commercial
424 webcam. Using the local minimum as a guide, we identified a threshold for maximum pixel
425 intensity change of 8 for videos acquired under red house light illumination and 10 for videos
426 acquired under white house light illumination. Frames that contain a maximum pixel intensity

427 change below or equal to these thresholds were algorithmically identified as duplicates, which
428 matched the duplicates identified manually in videos acquired with the commercial webcam.
429 The true frame rate of each video, which discounts the duplicate frames and more accurately
430 reflects the temporal resolution, was calculated using the equation:

$$431 \text{ true FPS} = \frac{\text{total frames} - \text{total duplicate frames}}{\text{recording length (s)}}.$$

432 The number of duplicate frames per second was calculated as:

$$433 \text{ duplicate frames per min} = \frac{\text{total duplicate frames}}{\text{recording length (s)}} \times 60.$$

434 Results were expressed as mean \pm SEM.

435

436 **Fisheye distortion correction**

437 Fisheye camera lenses, such as the one used in the recommended Arducam day-night
438 vision camera, allow for capture of a large field of view given a limited object distance. However,
439 they often produce images that are radially distorted, which may pose challenges to accurate
440 position tracking. Here, we describe a simple method to digitally correct fisheye image distortion
441 using a free, open-source OBS Studio plugin, the OBS ShaderFilter.

442 **Step-by-step instruction:**

- 443 1. On a Windows PC installed with OBS Studio, download the latest release of OBS
444 ShaderFilter plugin from its GitHub page: [https://github.com/Oncorporation/obs-](https://github.com/Oncorporation/obs-shaderfilter)
445 [shaderfilter](https://github.com/Oncorporation/obs-shaderfilter) (**Extended Figures 8-1 A1-2**), unzip the package file, and drag and drop its
446 contents to the OBS program file directory (**Extended Figure 8-1 A3**). The default file
447 location is `C:\Program Files\obs-studio`. Replace duplicate files if necessary
448 (**Extended Figure 8-1 A4**).
- 449 2. Next, download the entire repository from its GitHub page and unzip (**Extended Figure**
450 **8-1 B1**). Locate the “fisheye.shader” text file under the `obs-shaderfilter-`
451 `master\data\examples` directory, drag and drop to the OBS program file directory at

452 C:\Program Files\obs-studio\data\obs-plugins\obs-
453 shaderfilter\examples to store alongside other shader filters (**Extended Figure 8-1 B2**).
454

455 3. Launch OBS Studio and add a video source if you have not (**Extended Figure 8-1 C1**;
456 **Figure 6A**). To import pre-recorded videos for offline fisheye correction, add a “Media
457 Source” as the video source (**Extended Figure 8-1 C2**). To configure a fisheye camera
458 for real-time fisheye correction during recording, add a “Video Capture Device” as the
459 video source (**Extended Figure 8-1 C2**).

460 4. Right click the video source and select the “Filters” option (**Extended Figure 8-1 C3**). In
461 the pop-up window, under the “Effect Filters” header, click the “+” button to add a “User-
462 defined shader” (**Extended Figure 8-1 C4**), which can then be renamed to “Fisheye
463 correction” for clarification (**Extended Figures 8-1 C5**).

464 NOTE: If the “User-defined shader” is missing, repeat **Steps 1 & 2** to make sure the
465 plugin is correctly installed.

466 5. Select the option to “Load shader test from file” and click “Browse” to locate and load the
467 “fisheye.shader” text file. Adjust the “power” parameter to enhance or reduce fisheye
468 effect (**Extended Figure 8-1 C6**).

469 NOTE: A positive power adds more fisheye radial distortion while a negative power
470 corrects distortion. A power of zero means no change to the original image. See
471 **Extended Figure 8-2** for example power settings.

472 6. In the main OBS Interface, press “Start Recording” to record a new video if a camera
473 has been selected as the source or re-record a video with fisheye distortion corrected if
474 a pre-recorded video file has been selected as the source (**Extended Figure 8-1 C7**).

475

476 **Position tracking and locomotor activity measurement**

477 To assess the effects of fisheye distortion and digital correction on locomotor activity
478 measurement, position tracking was performed on videos with low distortion, fisheye distortion,
479 and distortion digitally corrected. Five videos of ~5 mins duration of adult female Long-Evans
480 rats exploring two contextually distinct compartments in a standard conditioned place
481 preference apparatus (MED Associates, St Albans, VT, USA) were acquired in OBS Studio from
482 two Pi USB Cams in tandem. One camera was equipped with a 70° HFOV low-distortion lens
483 and the other with a 100° HFOV fisheye lens (Arducam Technology Co., Limited, Hong Kong,
484 China; **Extended Table 1-1**). Videos with fisheye distortion were subsequently corrected using
485 the method described above. Position and locomotor measures were tracked offline using ANY-
486 maze software (Stoelting Co., Wood Dale, IL, USA). Each measure obtained was averaged
487 across all five videos and compared using a one-way ANOVA.

488 For real-time position tracking, a Pi USB Cam was directly interfaced with ANY-maze as
489 a USB camera to provide live video feed.

490 **RESULTS**491 **Pi USB Cam offers superior video quality & performance**

492 Of significant importance to our research needs was an affordable solution that
493 performed better under low-/no-light conditions within limited object distance compared to
494 commercially available webcams. Pi USB Cam outperformed the Logitech C930e webcam on
495 several measures of significance to behavioral neuroscience research. Monitoring of a standard
496 rat operant testing apparatus with a working area of 11.625" L x 9.78" W x 7.35" H was
497 successfully accomplished with the Pi USB Cam mounted overhead using the out-of-the-box
498 170° (DFOV) × 140° (HFOV) fisheye lens. Notably, in this orientation, the camera was placed
499 less than 1 cm above the testing apparatus therefore requiring essentially no additional vertical
500 space for video acquisition (**Figure 7A**). In contrast, the commercial counterpart, equipped with
501 a 90° DFOV lens, necessitated ~20 cm of vertical space to capture a similar field of view.
502 Moreover, positioning of the Pi USB Cam allowed for unobstructed access to the roof opening
503 enabling unimpeded movement of tethered animals, whereas angled placement of the Logitech
504 webcam was required to avoid collision with the commutator and tether.

505 Camera performance was qualitatively assessed under no-visible light condition (**Figure**
506 **7B**), and several standard low-visible light conditions inside an operant box including cue light
507 illumination (**Figure 7C**), red house light illumination (**Figure 7D**), white house light illumination
508 (**Figure 7E**), and white house light + cue light illumination (**Figure 7F**). With adequate IR
509 illumination, Pi USB Cam provided high image quality regardless of the level of the ambient
510 visible light. In contrast, the Logitech webcam was unable to perform in the no-light condition
511 and image quality was compromised under red house light illumination.

512 Pi USB Cam also outperformed the commercial webcam in terms of frame rate
513 maintenance. Unlike the Pi USB Cam, the commercial webcam was unable to maintain the set
514 frame rate of 20 FPS when interfacing with Synapse, losing on average 505.60 ± 69.40 frames
515 per min under white house light illumination and 702 ± 0.00 frames per min under red house

516 light illumination (**Table 3**). This resulted in video files that appear fast forward and shortened
517 when played offline by third-party media players that assume a constant, nominal frame rate of
518 20 FPS (**Movie 1**). Pi USB Cam, however, maintained a constant 20 FPS across all trials under
519 both lighting conditions. In contrast to Synapse, OBS Studio was able to achieve the maximum
520 frame rate of 30 FPS with either camera without dropping frames, as determined by the ratio of
521 total number of captured frames to recording length (data not shown). However, videos
522 recorded with the commercial webcam exhibited a high degree of duplicate frames. On average,
523 the webcam contained 1300.20 ± 1.20 duplicate frames per min under white house light
524 illumination and 1303.40 ± 0.24 duplicate frames per min under red house light illumination
525 (**Table 4**). As a result, these videos appear choppy during playback reflecting reduced temporal
526 resolution despite the high frame rate achieved (**Movie 2**). Importantly, this analysis cannot
527 distinguish between duplicate frames and instances when the animal does not move between
528 two frames. However, it should be noted that videos acquired with Pi USB Cam were judged to
529 be free of duplicate frames upon visual inspection. A similar algorithmic analysis of these videos
530 failed to uncover a clear threshold suggestive of duplicates, as their frequency distributions of
531 maximum change in grayscale pixel intensity appear unimodal as opposed to bimodal.
532 Nevertheless, when the same thresholds used for the commercial webcam were applied to
533 these videos, an average of 466.20 ± 43.24 frames per min were identified for videos under red
534 house light illumination and 310.40 ± 100.74 frames per min for videos under white house light
535 illumination. Not only was the number of identified frames much lower (64-76%) than that
536 observed with the commercial webcam, but this value also varied greatly from video to video.
537 Frames identified as duplicates were also unevenly distributed unlike those observed in videos
538 acquired using the commercial webcam. Combined with visual inspection, these suggest that
539 the algorithmically identified frames in Pi USB Cam videos reflect a lack of animal movement
540 rather than duplicate frames.
541

542 **Pi USB Cam is highly customizable for individual recording needs**

543 The recommended Arducam day-night vision camera can produce high quality video
544 images under both bright and low-/no-light conditions with relative ease (**Figures 7, 9-11,**
545 **Movies 3-4**) and can also be permanently set to engage or disengage the IR filter (**Figure 3A**).
546 Moreover, the ability to physically separate the accompanying IR LEDs from the camera body
547 allows for flexibility in illumination options under low-/no-light conditions (**Figures 4, 10D-F**).

548 We also benchmarked several M12 sized lenses compatible with the Arducam day-night
549 vision camera (see list in **Extended Table 1-1**), each of which is associated with a different field
550 of view and accompanying degree of image distortion. Our research needs necessitate
551 positioning of the Pi USB Cam off-center from the testing arena to accommodate for a tether
552 accessed through the roof opening. However, this orientation has the potential to result in
553 uneven image distortion across the field of view as distortion tends to be minimal at the center
554 of the fisheye field of view and progressively enlarged toward the radial edge of the image
555 (Clemmenson et al., 2020). Therefore, comparison of different lenses was performed with the
556 camera placed directly above the center of the arena at the level of the plexiglass roof about 20
557 cm above the grid floor measuring 11.5" L x 10.25" D x 1.75" H. As shown in **Figure 8**, we found
558 that the default lens (140° HFOV) struck the best balance between an adequate field of view to
559 capture the majority of the area of interest and an acceptable amount of image distortion to
560 enable accurate behavioral tracking. Comparison of the object distance required to obtain a
561 similar field of view across different M12 fisheye lenses is provided in **Extended Figure 8-2**.

562 Using the default lens, Pi USB Cam was also able to capture a generous field of view
563 when positioned for side viewing (at a distance of about 5 cm away from the plexiglass wall)
564 (**Figure 9, Movie 3**). However, in environments where object distance is not a limiting factor or
565 position accuracy is a primary concern, users can opt for lenses with a narrower field of view
566 and lower image distortion, or lenses designed specifically for minimum distortion (see
567 **Extended Table 1-1**). For example, overhead monitoring of a standard conditioned place

568 preference testing apparatus with a working area of 32.70" L x 8.25" W x 8" H, we found that a
569 100° (HFOV) fisheye lens was ideally suited to capture the entire testing arena when the
570 camera was positioned ~30 cm overhead (**Figure 11, Extended Figure 8-3, Movie 5-6**).

571

572 **Fisheye distortion correction allows for accurate position tracking and locomotor activity** 573 **measurement**

574 As an alternative to using low-distortion lenses, which often require larger object
575 distance that is incompatible with many experimental set ups, fisheye distortion can be digitally
576 corrected using the OBS ShaderFilter plugin (**Extended Figures 8-1, 8-2, and 8-3, Movie 5**) as
577 well as other widely available image processing algorithms. Benchmarked against a low-
578 distortion M12 lens, the fisheye image distortion from a 100 °HFOV lens and digital fisheye
579 correction imparted minimal effects on position tracking efficiency (**Extended Figures 8-3 A-C,**
580 **Movie 5**). One-way ANOVA of various locomotor measures revealed a significant between
581 group difference for distance travelled in the white side of the testing apparatus [$F(2,4) = 6.538,$
582 $p = 0.0462$] (**Extended Figure 8-3 D**). However, post-hoc comparisons failed to identify a
583 significant difference between pre-correction and low-distortion (Dunnett's test, $p = 0.0918$) or
584 post-correction and low-distortion (Dunnett's test, $p = 0.0783$). While no other statistically
585 significant differences were observed, visual inspection of the data makes clear that the
586 difference between pre-correction and low-distortion is lessened by digital correction. Therefore,
587 digital fisheye correction is likely to improve tracking accuracy in experiments where absolute,
588 rather than relative, measures are a high priority.

589

590 **Custom 3D-printed components afford flexible installation options tailored to individual** 591 **needs**

592 Our custom 3D-printed components (**Table 2**) provide added protection and allow Pi
593 USB Cam to be securely mounted on a variety of surfaces or structures. Using these

594 components, Pi USB Cam can be installed on a commutator balance arm post (**Figures 9A, C**),
595 a ring stand (**Figure 10A**), a wire shelf (**Figures 10D, 11A**), or any flat surface (**Figures 9B, D**).
596 Moreover, the hinged camera mount components provide ample degrees of freedom to finely
597 adjust camera positioning for optimal image acquisition. Thus, use of our custom 3D-printed
598 components ensures Pi USB Cam is readily adaptable to virtually any recording condition. This
599 includes recording within the limited space around a standard operant box inside a sound
600 attenuating cabinet (**Figure 9, Movie 3**), and many other common behavioral testing sites such
601 as a home cage environment (**Figure 10, Movie 4**) or larger scale testing arenas like a
602 conditioned place preference (CPP) apparatus (**Figure 11**).

603

604 **Pi USB Cam is highly scalable for multi-subject multi-site recording needs**

605 Using the free, open-source software, OBS Studio, we were able to successfully video-monitor
606 in real-time eight freely behaving rats in separate operant boxes with eight Pi USB Cams
607 operating simultaneously from a single host computer (**Figure 12A**). Acquired recordings were
608 subsequently saved into individual video files for further offline analysis. Using our settings
609 (**Figure 5D**), a 29 min recording produced on average 738.5 MB worth of video file in mkv
610 format (data not shown). At any given moment, each instance of OBS Studio used between 3-
611 6% of the six-core 3.20GHz CPU on our host computer and the overall CPU usage never
612 exceeded 50% when no other major application was running at the same time (**Figures 12B-C**).
613 Thus, the only major limiting factors to scaling Pi USB Cam are the USB bandwidth and CPU of
614 the host computer.

615 **DISCUSSION**

616 Pi USB Cam is an affordable, DIY video recording solution that combines simple
617 electronics and 3D printing to enable video monitoring of behavior in diverse recording
618 environments under any lighting condition. Our detailed build instructions are easy to follow and
619 require no specialized expertise. Camera components and accessories are easily sourced from
620 globally accessible vendors. In addition, because DIY components are often discontinued, we
621 provide an extensive list of alternatives that can serve as substitutes if circumstances require.
622 Using this design, we demonstrate its ease of use as a plug-and-play USB camera, with notable
623 superiority over a generic commercial webcam in terms of field of view, IR sensitivity, frame
624 rate, and overall flexibility to meet individual research needs. Lastly, we show that Pi USB Cam,
625 in combination with free, open-source video acquisition software, is easily scalable for multi-
626 subject and multi-site recordings.

627 Hardware flexibility is the main advantage of Pi USB Cam over commercially available
628 webcams. Indeed, despite their out-of-the-box user friendliness, the hardware of most
629 commercial webcams is simply not designed to acquire high quality video recordings in confined
630 spaces and/or poor lighting conditions. In contrast, Pi USB Cam can be used with a wide range
631 of camera modules that offer IR sensitivity for low-light recording, IR correction for bright-light
632 recording, fisheye lenses for wide-angle recording, low-distortion lenses for accurate position
633 tracking, etc. Due to its DIY nature, the cost of building Pi USB Cam is comparable to, if not
634 more affordable than, repurposed commercial webcams and a fraction of the cost of video
635 capture systems specialized for neuroscience research (**Extended Table 1-2**). This is
636 particularly important given that camera costs can present significant challenges to scalability
637 and throughput. Augmented by the burgeoning technology of 3D printing, Pi USB Cam can be
638 installed in various commonly used behavioral testing and housing settings without the need for
639 additional modifications to the testing apparatus or additional costly parts.

640 At the heart of the software design, the *Show-me webcam* firmware enables Raspberry
641 Pi cameras to become an out-of-box, plug-and-play USB camera. In contrast, most, if not all,
642 other DIY solutions require some level of programming proficiency to unlock even the most
643 basic functionalities of the microcomputer and related hardware (Saxena et al., 2018; Singh et
644 al., 2019; Weber and Fisher, 2019; Clemensson et al., 2020; Centanni and Smith, 2021). While
645 DIY solutions tend to turn researchers away due to the steep learning curve associated with
646 such requirements, Pi USB Cam ensures novices need not reinvent the wheel. As a USB
647 camera, Pi USB Cam can be readily integrated into pre-existing video recording systems,
648 ranging from the popular open-source recording/streaming app OBS Studio to the professional
649 neural/behavioral recording software Synapse. As such, limited only by the specifications of the
650 host recording computer, Pi USB Cam can be readily scaled to facilitate multi-subject, multi-site,
651 high-throughput experimental designs. Depending on the recording software of choice, users of
652 Pi USB Cam have the option to watch live video feeds for real-time behavioral monitoring on
653 screen or via network streaming. Users also have the freedom to save video recordings in their
654 preferred file format and location where they can be accessed for offline analysis using
655 sophisticated behavioral tracking algorithms such as ezTrack (Pennington et al., 2019) and
656 DeepLabCut (Mathis et al., 2018). For real-time applications that rely on live video feeds, Pi
657 USB Cam is again able to integrate as a plug-and-play USB camera with powerful, yet widely
658 available neuroscience research applications like ANY-maze, which combine real-time video
659 tracking with various control devices (e.g., optogenetic laser) to achieve closed-loop
660 neural/behavioral manipulation (see **Movie 6** for example). Although not tested here, Pi USB
661 Cam is also compatible with recently developed open-source video tracking and control
662 systems, which readily support USB cameras including DeepLabCut-Live (Kane et al., 2020)
663 and DeepLabStream (Schweihoff et al., 2021).

664 While the Pi USB Cam offers an easy-to-use, flexible, and affordable option for
665 behavioral neuroscientists to acquire video recordings, several limitations of our system should

666 be noted. Previous approaches using Raspberry Pi cameras are designed such that the
667 microcomputer performs the heavy lifting of video encoding (Saxena et al., 2018; Singh et al.,
668 2019; Weber and Fisher, 2019; Clemensson et al., 2020; Centanni and Smith, 2021). The
669 advantage of such a design is that it has no inherent limits on scalability other than the number
670 of cameras an individual can purchase. In contrast, Pi USB Cam requires a standalone host
671 computer to perform recordings. In addition to this expense and the footprint associated with a
672 host computer in close proximity to behavioral testing apparatuses, the number of video streams
673 that can be encoded and stored in tandem is limited by the host computer's processing power
674 and bandwidth. While such a configuration could be problematic for some research needs, we
675 felt that function similar to a commercial webcam makes Pi USB Cam more user friendly and
676 approachable than standalone alternatives. Moreover, connection with a host computer
677 provides significantly greater ease of real-time video monitoring than standalone Raspberry Pi
678 cameras. While *Show-me webcam* is more than adequate for video recording, it does not
679 currently support audio capture. Although this could change in a later release of the firmware,
680 currently video recordings requiring audio measures (e.g., ultrasonic vocalizations, audio cues)
681 necessitate use of a standalone microphone to capture audio independent of video feed, which
682 can then be synchronized online or offline depending on the recording software used. As with
683 any open-source DIY solution, Pi USB Cam software will require regular and timely updates in
684 tandem with upgrades to Raspberry Pi hardware and operating system. However, the well-
685 established open-source community of *Show-me webcam* developers has a strong history of
686 providing regular support and upgrades for the firmware. This is unlike previous niche DIY video
687 solutions, which have often relied on a single individual to perform upgrades and consequently
688 have had difficulty surviving beyond initial hardware and operating system versions (Singh et al.,
689 2019). Finally, our custom 3D-printed case and mount tools require access to a quality 3D
690 printer. However, as the technology of 3D printing matures, small-scale consumer printers are

691 becoming increasingly more affordable, and larger-scale industrial fee-for-service printers are
692 often offered at universities/institutions.

693 In summary, Pi USB Cam is a highly versatile and affordable DIY video recording
694 solution for real-time behavioral monitoring and offline analysis. Requiring minimum time,
695 expertise, and financial commitment to implement, Pi USB Cam offers behavioral
696 neuroscientists a powerful, yet simple, solution for high quality and high-throughput behavioral
697 data collection. We encourage users to reference the current manuscript when implementing Pi
698 USB Cam in their own experiments.

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727

728

729 **FIGURE LEGENDS**

730 **Movie 1. Comparison of Pi USB Cam and commercial webcam performance using**
731 **specialized neural recording software for video acquisition.**

732

733 **Movie 2. Comparison of Pi USB Cam and commercial webcam performance using OBS**
734 **Studio**

735

736 **Movie 3. Example video showing versatile implementation of Pi USB Cam for behavioral**
737 **monitoring.**

738

739 **Movie 4. Example video showing versatile implementation of Pi USB Cam for rodent**
740 **home cage monitoring.**

741

742 **Movie 5. Example video showing position tracking performed on a video acquired with a**
743 **fisheye lens before and after distortion correction, and a video obtained with a low-**
744 **distortion lens.**

745

746 **Movie 6. Example video showing real-time closed-loop behavioral control by a commonly**
747 **used video-tracking system combined with Pi USB Cam.**

748

749 **Figure 1. Camera software setup. (A)** Insert a clean micro-SD card into a computer. **(B)**
750 Download the latest release of the *Show-me webcam* image file from its official GitHub page.
751 **(C)** Install the *Show-me webcam* image file on the micro-SD card using the official Raspberry Pi
752 Imager. Image source: <https://github.com/raspberrypilearning/components>

753

754 **Figure 2. Camera hardware setup.** (A) Essential components required to build a Pi USB Cam
755 including the main Raspberry Pi board, a USB to USB-C cable, a micro-SD card, the camera
756 module, and a camera ribbon flex cable (listed from left to right). (B) Remove the attached IR
757 LEDs from the main camera board by unscrewing the four screws outlined in red. (C) Connect
758 the main camera board to the Raspberry Pi 4B board via a camera ribbon flex cable. See
759 Extended Figure 2-1 for a labeled diagram of the Pi motherboard. (D) Insert the prepared micro-
760 SD card (see Figure 1 for software setup) into the Raspberry Pi board. (E) Power up the Pi USB
761 Cam by connecting it to a computer using the USB cable. (F) House the camera in custom 3D-
762 printed case and mount tools for protection and installation in behavioral testing environment.

763

764 **Figure 3. Adjusting camera settings.** (A) Manually enable IR sensitivity by covering the
765 photoresistor with non-translucent tape (1) or enable IR correction by unplugging the connector
766 on the back of the camera (2). (B) Use of our recommended low-light custom settings (right)
767 eliminates slightly purple hue obtained using the camera's default settings (left) when recording
768 in total darkness. (C) In contrast, the same low-light settings produce an unwanted yellow hue
769 (right) under bright light conditions when default settings (left) produce a more appropriate
770 image. (D) To adjust camera settings, connect the Pi USB Cam containing the micro-SD card
771 into a host computer. (E) Identify the COM port for the Pi USB Cam in Windows Device
772 Manager. (F) Connect to the Pi USB Cam using the open-source software PuTTY. (G) Enter the
773 command shown in (1) to access all adjustable camera setting (2). Settings we recommend
774 adjusting for low-light recordings are highlighted in red. (H) Adjust the focus by unscrewing the
775 small screw that secures the lens in place (arrow) and twisting the lens in either direction until
776 your desired image quality is achieved. *Recommended settings for each lighting condition.

777

778 **Figure 4. Wiring IR LEDs independent from Pi USB Cam.** (A) Unwanted flare artifacts are
779 apparent when IR LED boards remain attached to and powered directly by the camera board

780 and the camera is mounted over a reflective surface. Detaching the IR LEDs from the camera
781 board allows for flexible placement in a configuration that avoids these flares as well as
782 shadows cast by other equipment such as what is observed when the LEDs are mounted
783 overhead **(B)** versus away from the reflective surface **(C)**. **(D)** Custom-made jumper wires **(1-3)**
784 necessary to wire the IR LED boards in parallel and power them via a pair of 3v3 power and
785 ground pins on the Pi board. See Extended Figure 4-1 and 4-2 for additional wiring instructions.
786 **(E)** Fully connected IR LED unit and Pi board. The locations of 3v3 power pins (highlighted in
787 pink) and ground pins (highlighted in in black) on the 40-pin header are illustrated in the inset.
788 **(F)** Heat sinks should be installed on the back of the LED boards **(1)** to prevent overheating
789 after housing them in the custom 3D printed case **(2)**. **(G)** CAD rendering of the IR LED housing
790 and mount parts **(1)** and a close-up photo of a fully assembled and mounted IR LED unit **(2)**.

791

792 **Figure 5. Set up for multi-camera recordings.** **(A)** The following steps should be done in OBS
793 Studio from a host computer connected to one or more Pi USB Cams. **(B)** Verify in the Windows
794 Device Manager that no more than three cameras are connected to each USB controller. **(C)**
795 Main OBS Studio interface. Menu, Sources, and Controls panels are highlighted. Users can
796 generate a “Profile” from the drop-down menu **(D1-2)** and use the “Controls” panel to access
797 various recording settings **(D3-7)**. Image source: [https://github.com/obsproject/obs-](https://github.com/obsproject/obs-studio/blob/master/UI/forms/images/obs_256x256.png)
798 [studio/blob/master/UI/forms/images/obs_256x256.png](https://github.com/obsproject/obs-studio/blob/master/UI/forms/images/obs_256x256.png)

799

800 **Figure 6. Recommended configuration for separate recordings from multiple video**
801 **sources.** For each Pi USB Cam, create a “Scene Collection” from the drop-down menu **(A1-2)**
802 and add the camera as a video source using the “Sources” panel **(A3-7)**. **(B)** Launch additional
803 instances of OBS Studio to record from multiple camera sources. See Extended Figure 6-1 for a
804 detailed explanation of OBS Studio configurations.

805

806 **Figure 7. Video quality comparison between Pi USB Cam and commercial webcam.**
807 Snapshots of videos acquired using Pi USB Cam (left column) and Logitech C930e webcam
808 (right column) mounted overhead at a distance that accommodated the entire field of view **(A)**.
809 Recordings were made under **(B)** no light, **(C)** cue light illumination, **(D)** red light illumination, **(E)**
810 white light illumination, and **(F)** white light illumination + cue lights.

811

812 **Figure 8. Comparison of different Pi USB Cam-compatible fisheye lenses.** Pictures of a Pi
813 USB Cam equipped with various M12 fisheye lenses **(1)** including 180° **(A)**, 140° **(B)**, 118° **(C)**,
814 100° **(D)**, 73° **(E)**, 67° **(F)**, 33° **(G)**, and 26° **(H)**. Corresponding snapshots of videos acquired
815 from a centered position overhead of the arena at a distance of ~20 cm from the rod floor are
816 depicted for each lens **(2)**. *Indicates the default lens that comes with the Arducam day-night
817 vision camera. See accompanying Extended Figures for digital fisheye distortion correction **(8-**
818 **1)**, comparison of lenses at different object distances **(8-2)**, and position tracking comparisons
819 under distorted and low-distortion video acquisition settings **(8-3)**.

820

821 **Figure 9. Camera implementation for operant box monitoring.** Use of custom 3D-printed
822 components allows for versatile camera installation options including overhead **(A-B)** and side
823 **(C-D)** mounted configurations. For each option, **(1)** depicts the CAD drawing of 3D printed
824 components. Close-up photos of each configuration are provided in **(2)** with object distance
825 indicated in **(3)**. For overhead viewing, Pi USB Cam can be mounted on a commutator balance
826 arm post **(A)** or directly on the roof panel **(B)**. Similar post **(C)** and wall **(D)** mount options are
827 available for side view configuration. Both overhead **(E)** and side view **(F)** configurations allow
828 for full view of the operant arena. Video snapshots acquired under no-light conditions.

829

830 **Figure 10. Camera implementation for home cage monitoring.** Custom 3D-printed
831 components can also be configured to accommodate home cage recordings in a variety of

832 settings including mount to a ring stand **(A-C)** for recordings performed offsite (e.g., testing
833 room) and on wire shelving **(D-F)** for recordings inside the vivarium. For each option **(1)** depicts
834 the CAD drawing of 3D printed components. Close up photos of each configuration are provided
835 in **(2)** with object distance indicated in **(3)**. Pi USB Cam is easily mounted to a ring stand **(A)** to
836 accommodate offsite recordings in the home cage shown here in both bright-light **(B)** and no-
837 light **(C)** conditions. Note that in this configuration the IR LEDs are used in the default
838 configuration such that they are attached to and powered directly by the main camera board.
839 Using the custom 3D-printed G clamp, Pi USB Cam (and independent IR LEDs) can also be
840 mounted directly to shelving **(D)** shown here in both bright-light **(E)** and no-light **(F)** conditions.

841

842 **Figure 11. Camera configuration for large apparatus video recordings.** Together with
843 custom 3D-printed components, Pi USB Cam can be configured to record from large behavioral
844 testing arenas like the conditioned place preference apparatus shown here. **(A1)** CAD drawing
845 of the 3D printed components used in this configuration. **(A2)** Close-up photo of Pi USB Cam
846 mounted overhead on a wire shelf. **(A3)** The entire testing arena is visualized overhead with the
847 camera mounted at a distance of ~30 cm using a 100° HFOV fisheye lens. Video snapshots
848 acquired with this configuration under bright-light **(B)** and no-light **(C)** conditions.

849

850 **Figure 12. Pi USB Cam scalability is limited only by USB bandwidth and host computer**
851 **specifications.** **(A)** Multi-subject multi-site recordings are easily achieved using the free and
852 open-source video capture software OBS Studio depicted here with eight independent Pi USB
853 Cams installed in eight separate operant boxes. **(B)** Windows Task Manager shows the CPU
854 usage of each instance of OBS Studio during multi-camera recordings (n=8) using the same
855 video acquisition settings shown in Figure 5D and a host computer with the specifications
856 depicted in **(C)** including CPU, memory **(1)**, and add-on USB controllers from a USB PCIe
857 expansion card **(2)**.

858

859 **Table 1. Store-bought components list.** Vendor, catalog number and price for all store-bought
860 components used in current build. See Extended Table 1-1 for a comprehensive list of parts
861 plus alternative options and additional accessories. See Extended Table 1-2 for cost estimates
862 for complete build.

863

864 **Table 2. Custom 3D-printed components.** Comprehensive list of all 3D-printed components
865 used in the current build. STL files and print instruction are accessible at
866 <https://www.thingiverse.com/gloverlab/designs>.

867

868 **Table 3. Dropped frame comparison between Pi USB Cam and commercial webcam.** 5-
869 minute videos (640x480 resolution, 20 FPS, avi format) were recorded from each camera via
870 Synapse software for five trials under red and white house light illumination. Results are
871 expressed as mean \pm SEM.

872

873 **Table 4. Duplicate frame comparison between Pi USB Cam and commercial webcam.** 5-
874 minute videos (640x480 resolution, 30 FPS, mp4 format) were recorded from each camera via
875 OBS Studio for five trials under red and white house light illumination. Results are expressed as
876 mean \pm SEM.

877

878 **Extended Figure 2-1. Diagram of the Raspberry Pi 4B motherboard.** Image source:
879 [https://github.com/raspberrypi/documentation/blob/develop/documentation/asciidoc/computers/o](https://github.com/raspberrypi/documentation/blob/develop/documentation/asciidoc/computers/using-gpio.adoc)
880 [s/using-gpio.adoc](https://github.com/raspberrypi/documentation/blob/develop/documentation/asciidoc/computers/using-gpio.adoc)

881

882 **Extended Figure 4-1. Step-by-step instructions for crimping ring terminal connectors. (A)**

883 Gather all essential parts: **(1)** electrical wire AWG22, non-insulated ring terminal connector

884 AWG22-16 #4 stud size, heat shrink tubing 1/8", **(2)** Astro crimping tool with B-Jaw for non-
885 insulated terminals, and wire stripper. **(B-D)** Strip the wire to expose ~4 mm of conducting wire,
886 comparable to the length of the wire barrel of the connector. **(D)** Cut one short segment of 1/8"
887 heat shrinking tubing that is long enough to cover the entire wire barrel (≥ 6 mm) and put it on
888 the wire before crimping. **(E)** Crimp the connector to the bare wire using the first die (DIN 0.5-
889 1.5mm²) on the B-Jaw of the Astro crimping tool. **(F)** Make sure to visually inspect and perform
890 a gentle pull test to confirm the crimp is successful. **(G)** Fully cover the entire wire barrel with
891 heat shrink tubing and use a heat gun to shrink the tubing.

892

893 **Extended Figure 4-2. Step-by-step instructions for crimp pin terminal connectors. (A)**

894 Gather all essential parts: **(1)** electrical wire AWG22, male or female pin terminal connector,
895 plastic housing, **(2)** Astro crimping tool with H-Jaw for open barrel terminals, and wire stripper.
896 **(B-C)** Strip the wire to expose ~2.5mm of conducting wire. **(D)** Insert the stripped wire into the
897 pin terminal connector while making sure that the bare wire falls within the wire barrel of the
898 connector and the wire insulation is inside the insulation barrel. Gently bend the insulation barrel
899 around the wire insulation to prevent connector or wire from moving out of place during
900 crimping. **(E)** Crimp the connector to the wire using the middle die (DIN 0.5mm²) on the H-Jaw
901 of the Astro crimping tool. Make sure that the open barrel is facing towards the "nest" of the
902 crimping die and both wire barrel and insulation barrel are positioned in the appropriate spots of
903 the crimping die. **(F)** Visually inspect and perform a gentle pull test to confirm the crimp is
904 successful. **(G)** Insert the crimped connector into a plastic housing. Visually inspection and
905 gentle pull test should be performed to make sure that the connector is securely housed in order
906 to avoid issues with mating pins.

907

908 **Extended Figure 6-1. Schematics showing several options to preview and/or record from**

909 **multiple video sources. (A)** One scene with multiple video sources operating within one

910 instance of OBS Studio recorded into a single video file. **(B)** Multiple scenes each with their own
911 video source operating within one instance of OBS Studio. Recording produces video from a
912 single scene / video source. **(C)** Multiple scene collections each with their own video source
913 running in independent instances of OBS Studio produce independent video files. Image
914 source: https://github.com/obsproject/obs-studio/blob/master/UI/forms/images/obs_256x256.png

915

916 **Extended Figure 8-1. Digital correction of fisheye distortion.** **(A)** Download the OBS
917 ShaderFilter plugin from its GitHub page and install on a Windows PC equipped with OBS
918 Studio. **(B)** Download the “fisheye.shader” text file located in its GitHub repository. In the main
919 OBS interface, add a pre-recorded video as a “Media source” for offline fisheye correction or a
920 camera as a “Video Capture Device” for real-time fisheye correction **(C1-2)**. Enable the
921 ShaderFilter plugin and fisheye correction for each video source **(C3-7)**.

922

923 **Extended Figure 8-2. Comparison of Pi USB Cam-compatible fisheye lenses in terms of**
924 **object distance and fisheye correction.** Pictures showing the object distance of a Pi USB
925 Cam **(1)** equipped with various M12 fisheye lenses including 180° **(A)**, 140° **(B)**, 118° **(C)**, 100°
926 **(D)**, and 73° **(E)** for overhead viewing in a standard operant box. Snapshots of raw videos
927 acquired from a centered position at the corresponding object distances showing comparable
928 captured fields **(2)**, and the same videos after the fisheye image distortion was digitally
929 corrected using the OBS ShaderFilter plugin **(3)**. Power settings used are indicated on each
930 image. *Indicates the default lens that comes with the Arducam day-night vision camera.

931

932 **Extended Figure 8-3. Effects of fisheye distortion on position tracking and locomotor**
933 **measures.** Snapshots of ANY-maze position tracking **(1)** performed on a video acquired with a
934 100° HFOV fisheye lens without distortion correction **(A)**, after digital distortion correction **(B)**,
935 and from a video acquired in tandem using a 70° HFOV low-distortion lens **(C)**. Representative

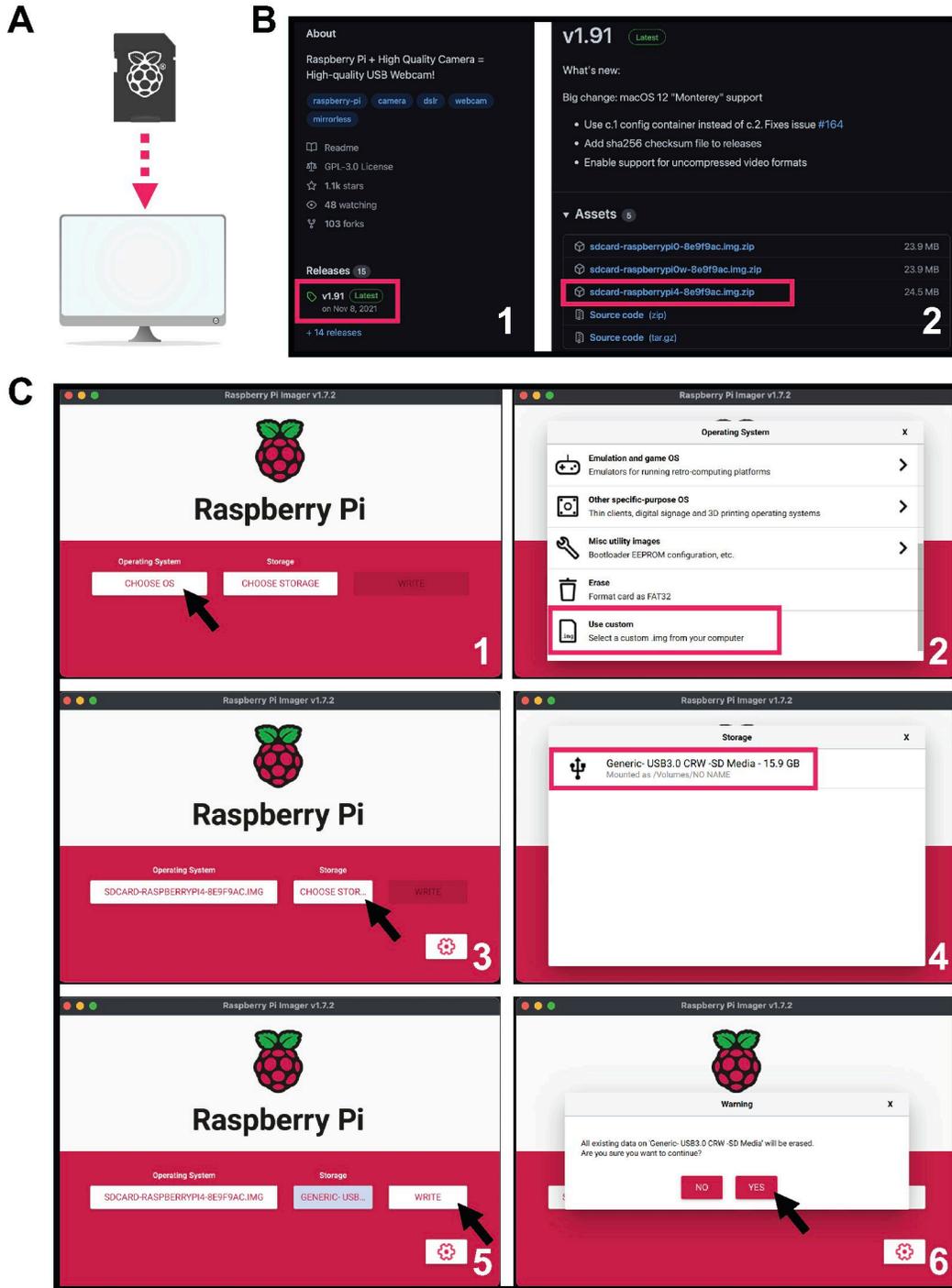
936 center-point tracking plots **(2)** and heatmaps **(3)** from the same video show similar results. **(D)**
937 Effects of fisheye distortion and correction on position tracking accuracy were demonstrated by
938 comparing various locomotor activity measures, including the total distance travelled **(1)** and
939 average speed **(2)** during the entire test duration, as well as the total distance travelled **(3-4)**,
940 average speed **(5-6)**, and time spent **(7-8)** in either side of the testing apparatus.

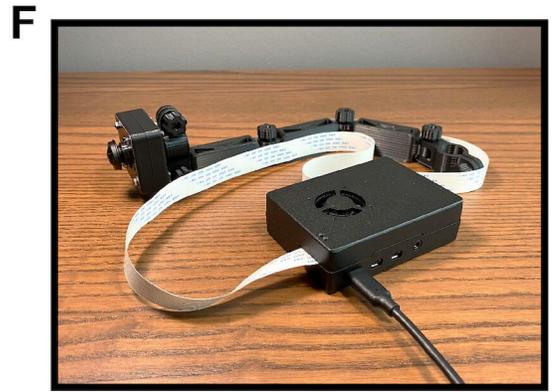
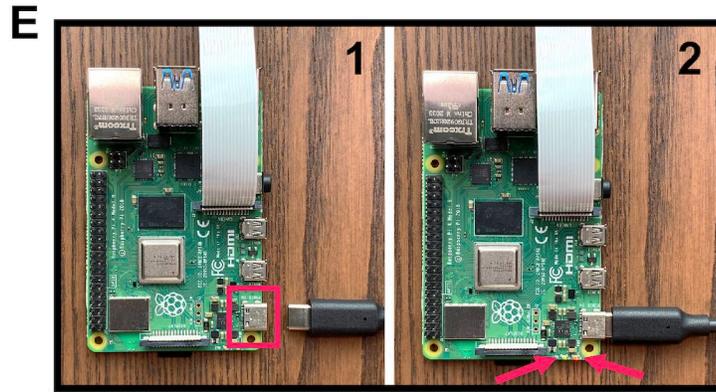
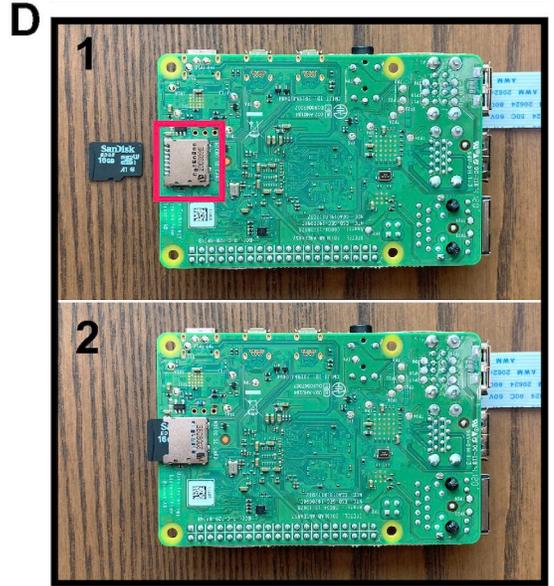
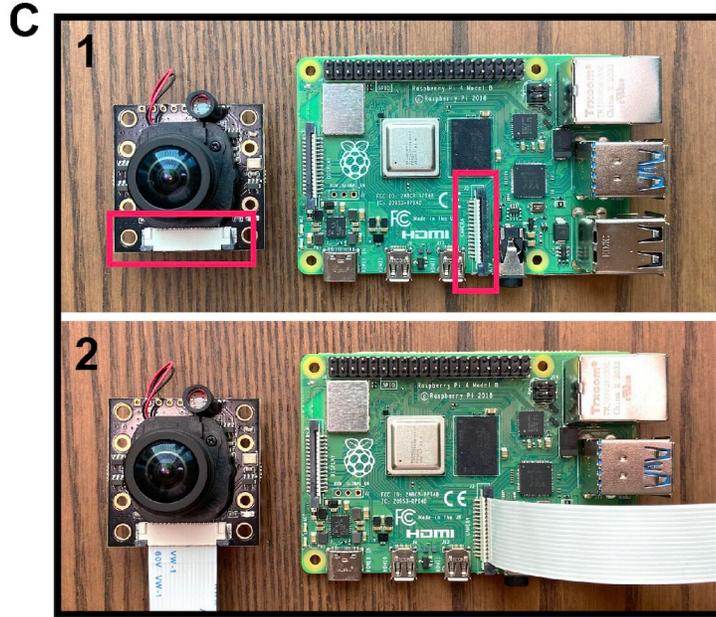
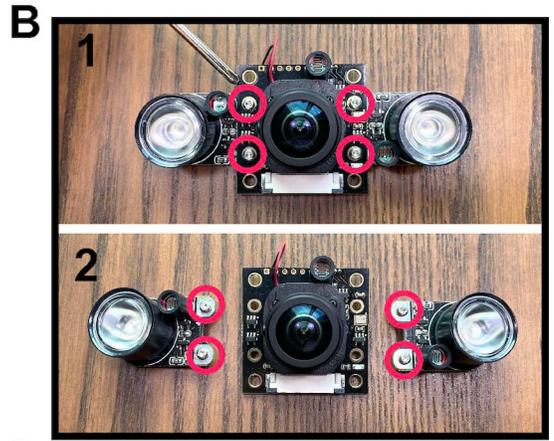
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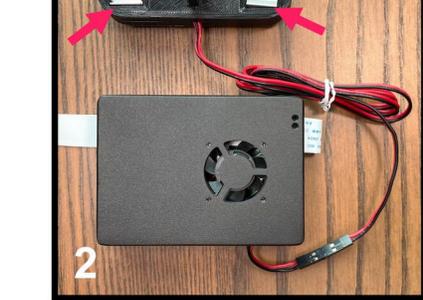
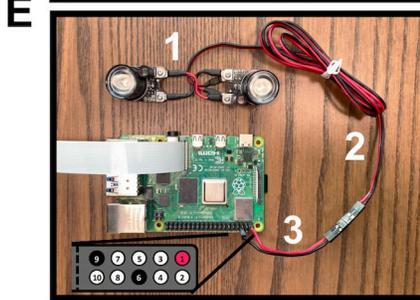
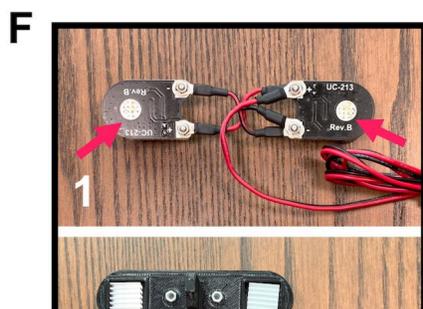
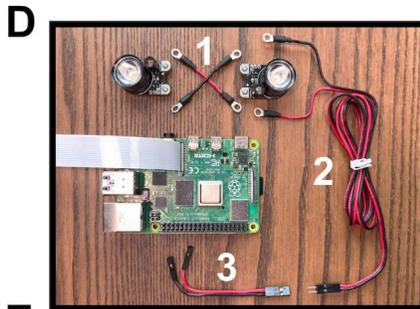
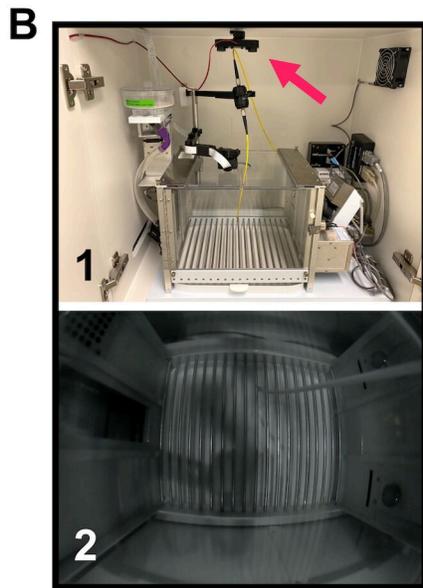
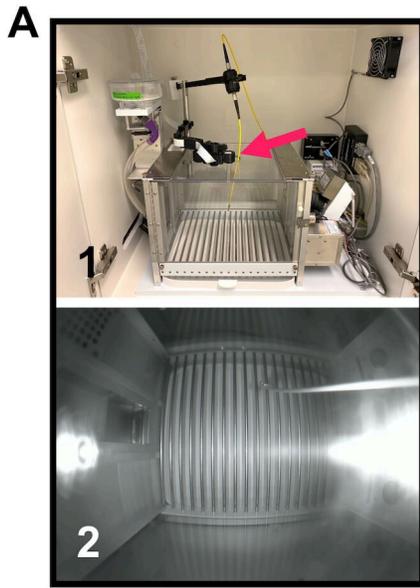
942 **Extended Table 1-1. List of store-bought components including alternative options and**
943 **accessories.**

944

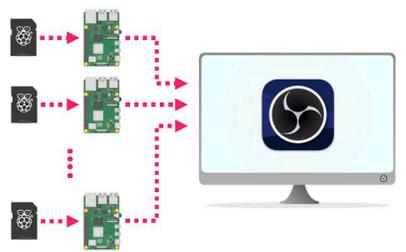
945 **Extended Table 1-2. Pi USB Cam Expenses.** Laboratories can choose equipment based on
946 budget constraints. Tools and supplies are listed separately because they are only required if
947 users intend to use the IR LEDs independently from the camera as shown in Figure 4 and/or if
948 laboratories are not already stocked with these items. Note that the grand total (n=8) for the
949 upper bound includes the cost of one set of tools and supplies as well as the cost for eight sets
950 of essential equipment. Our university rate for 3D-printing services of \$30/kg of PLA plastic was
951 used to calculate the upper bound cost of 3D printed components, whereas the lower bound
952 was calculated as the expense for only the purchase of plastic for those laboratories that
953 already have a 3D printer. A complete camera (Figure 2F) and IR LED (Figure 4G) holder is
954 estimated to require ~130 g of PLA plastic based on our recommended print settings.
955 Commercial Webcam = Logitech C930e Webcam; Industrial camera estimates based on quotes
956 from June 2022 from three widely used behavioral neuroscience suppliers.







A

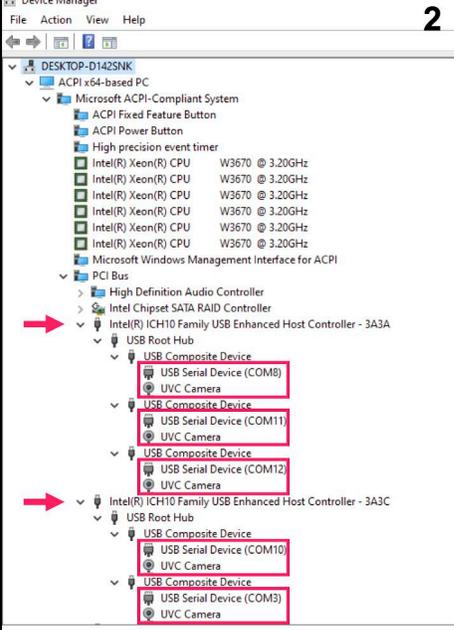


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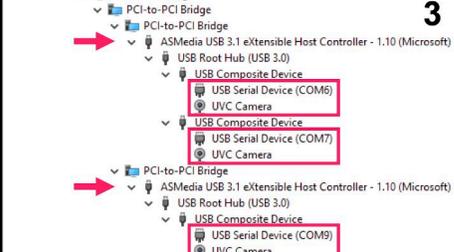
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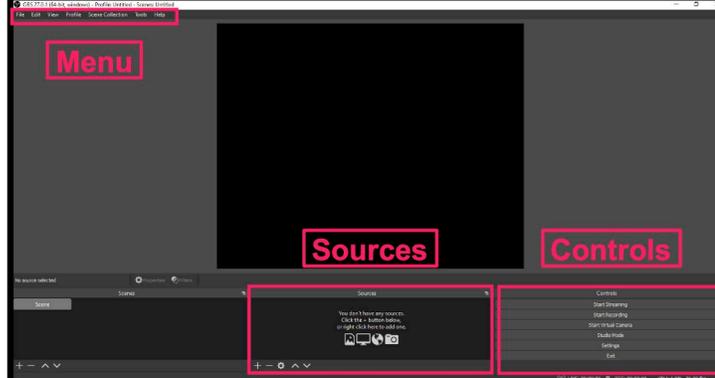
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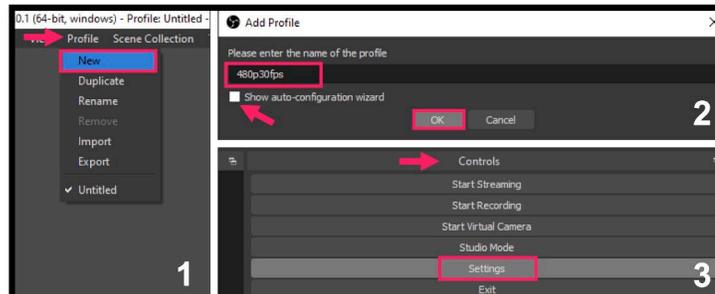


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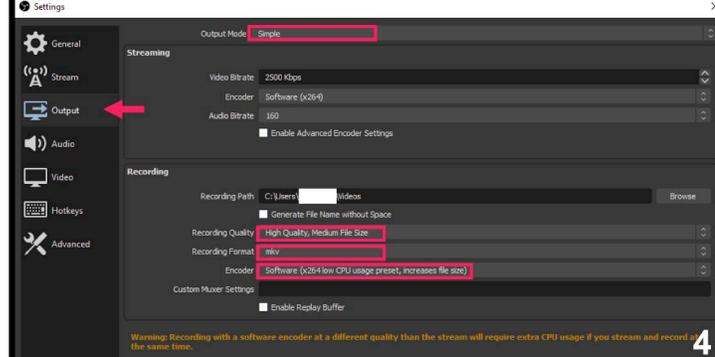


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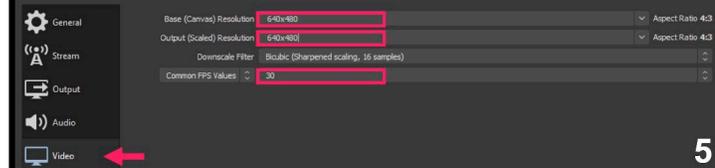
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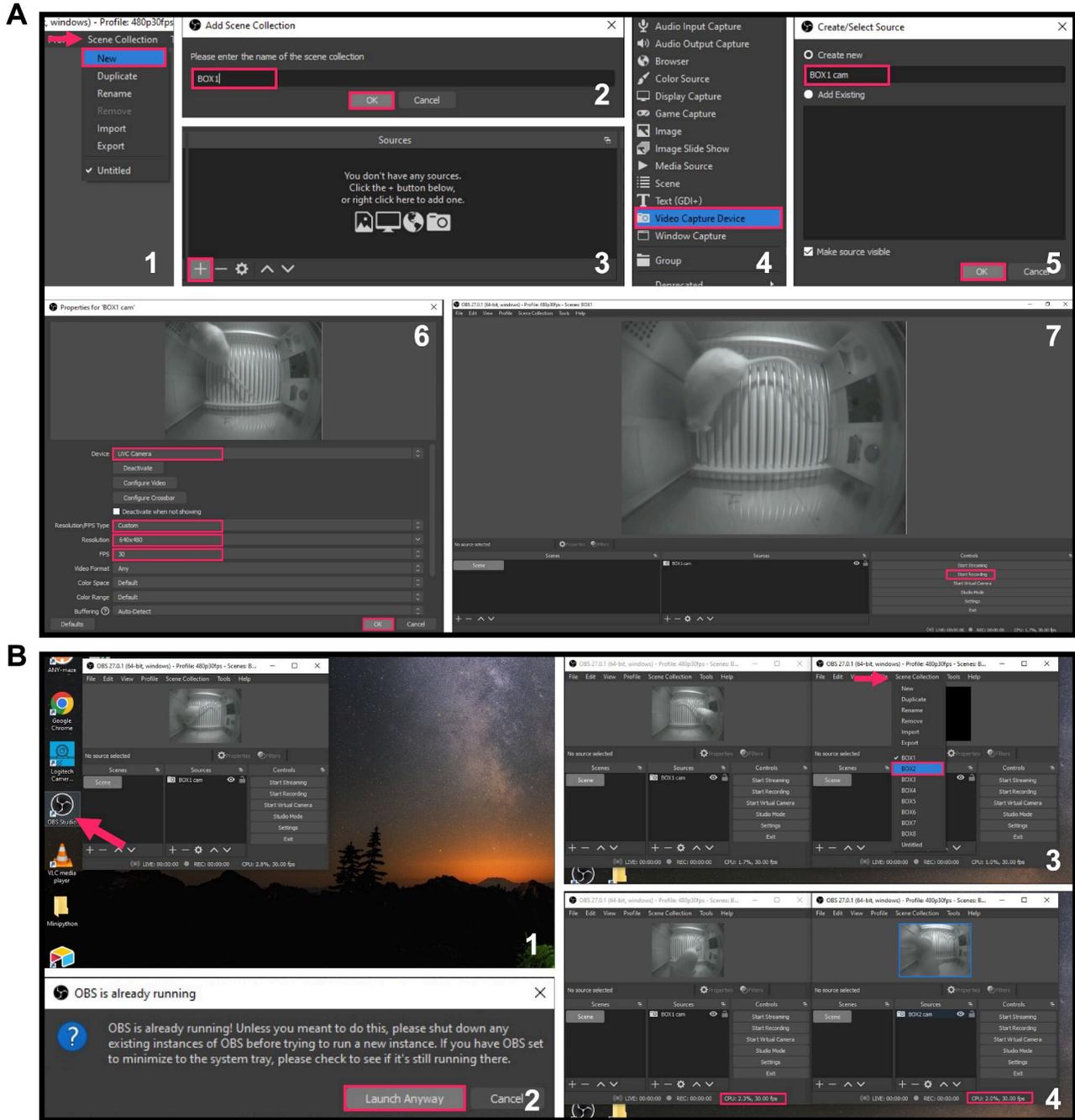
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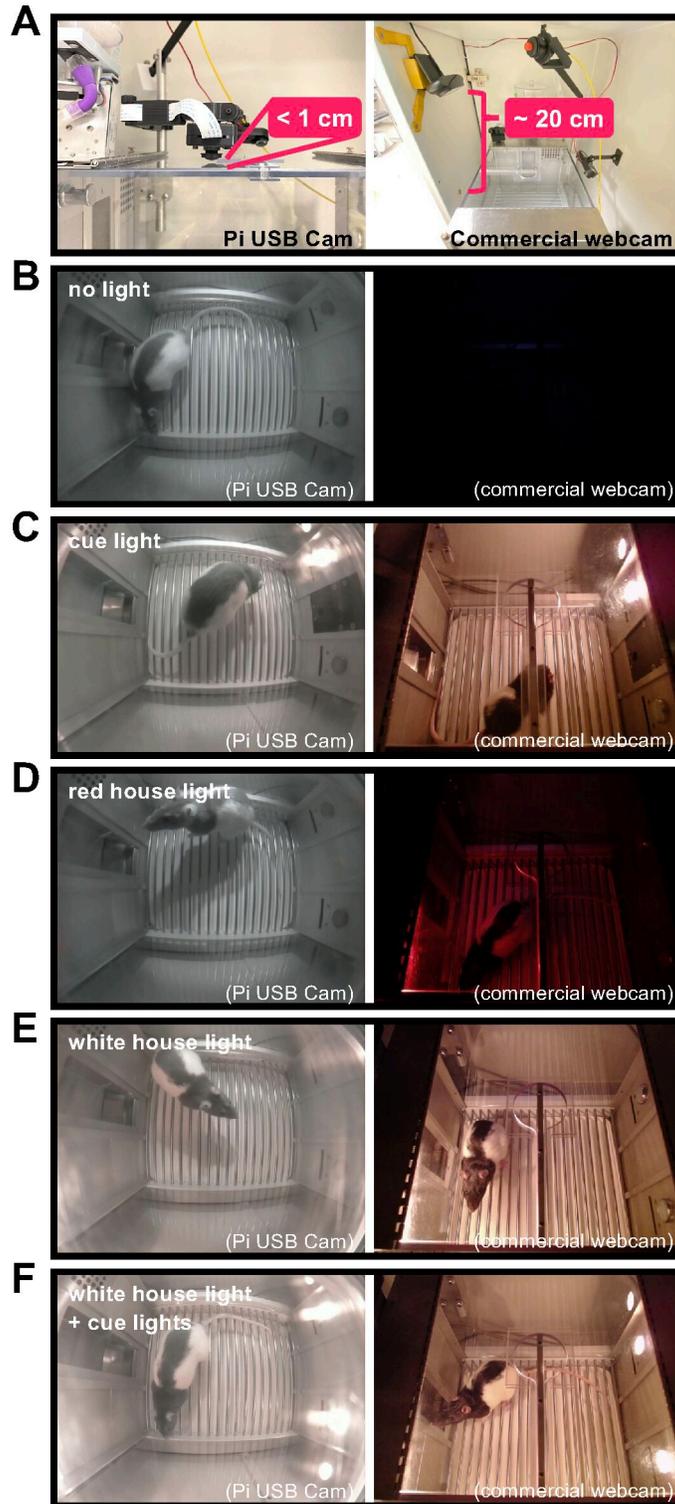


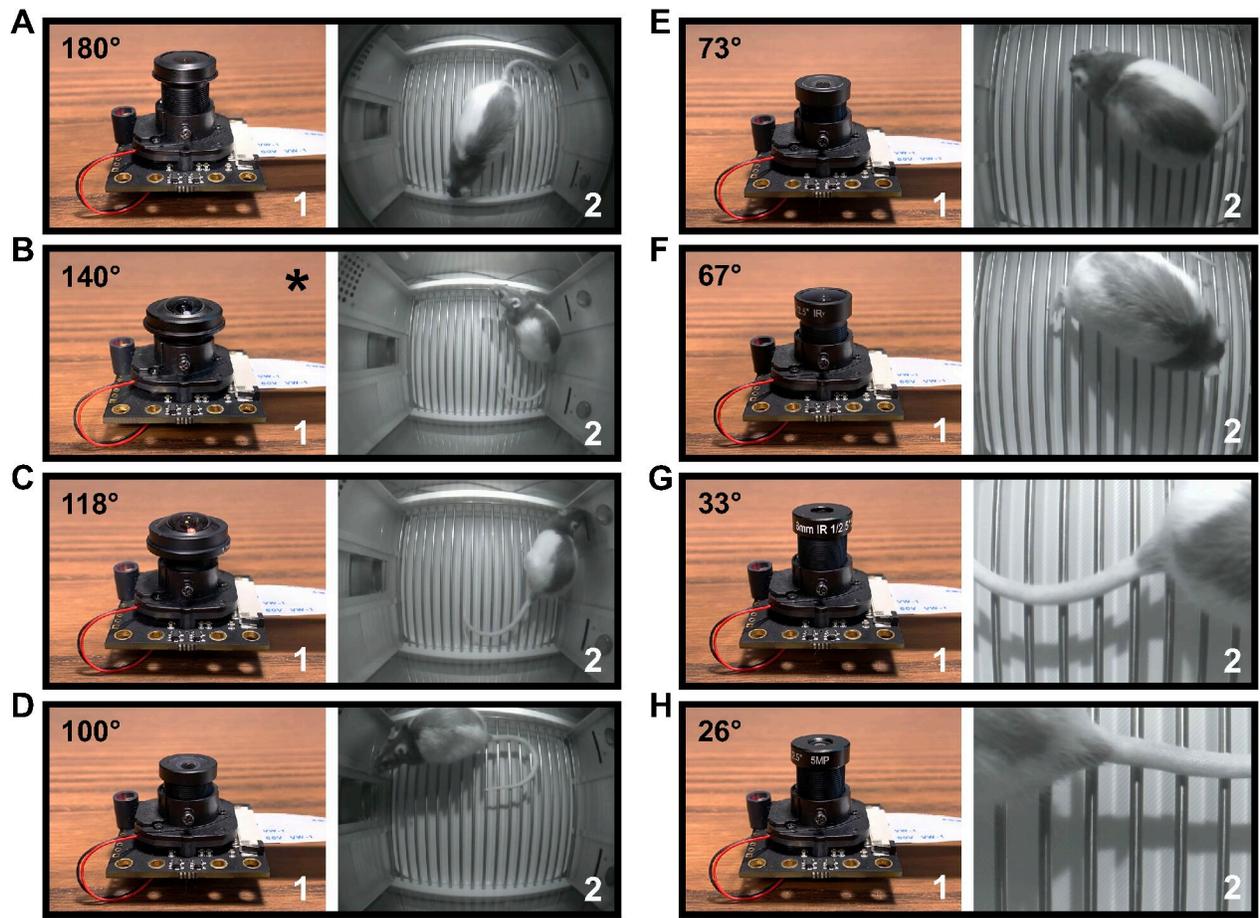
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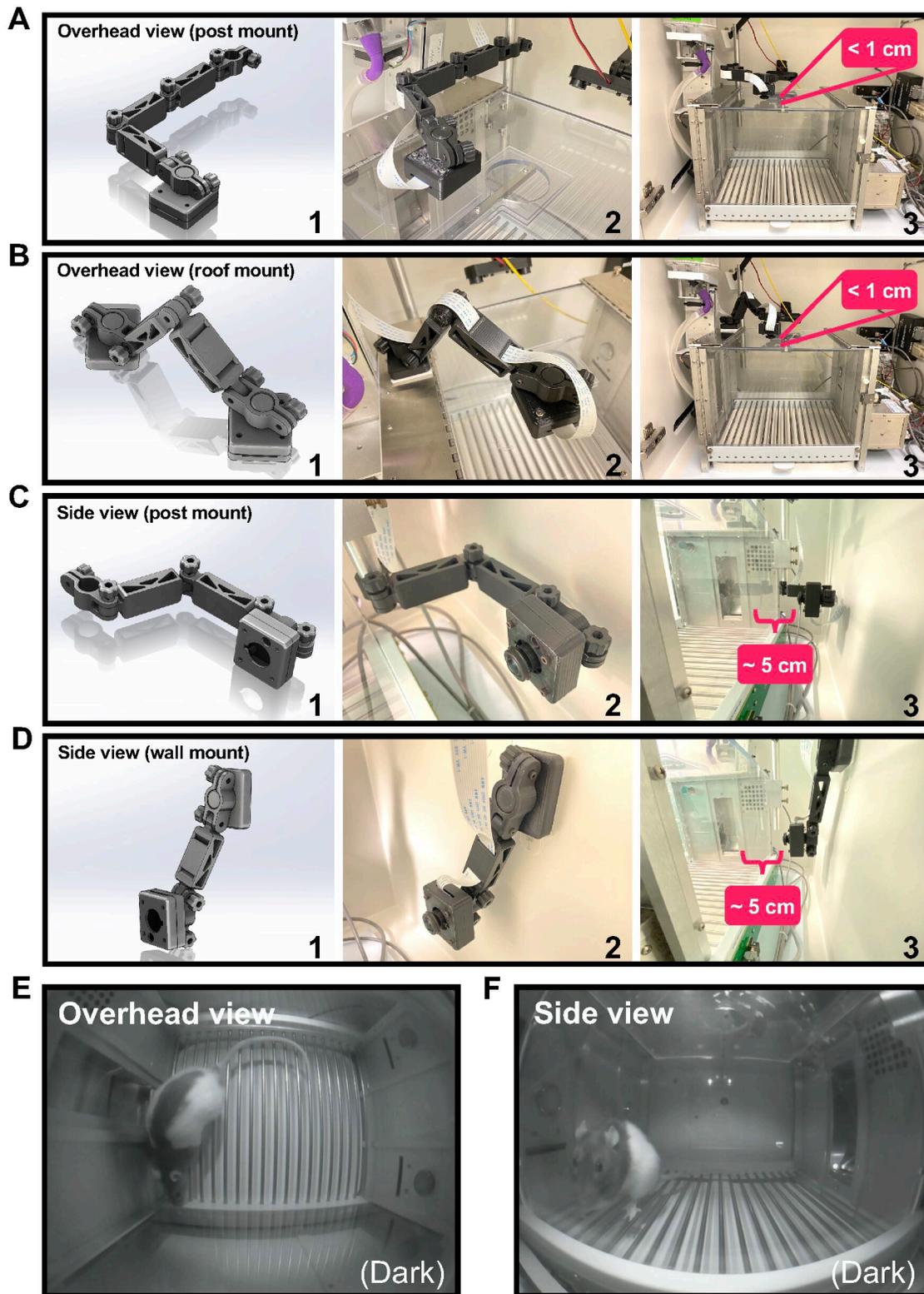
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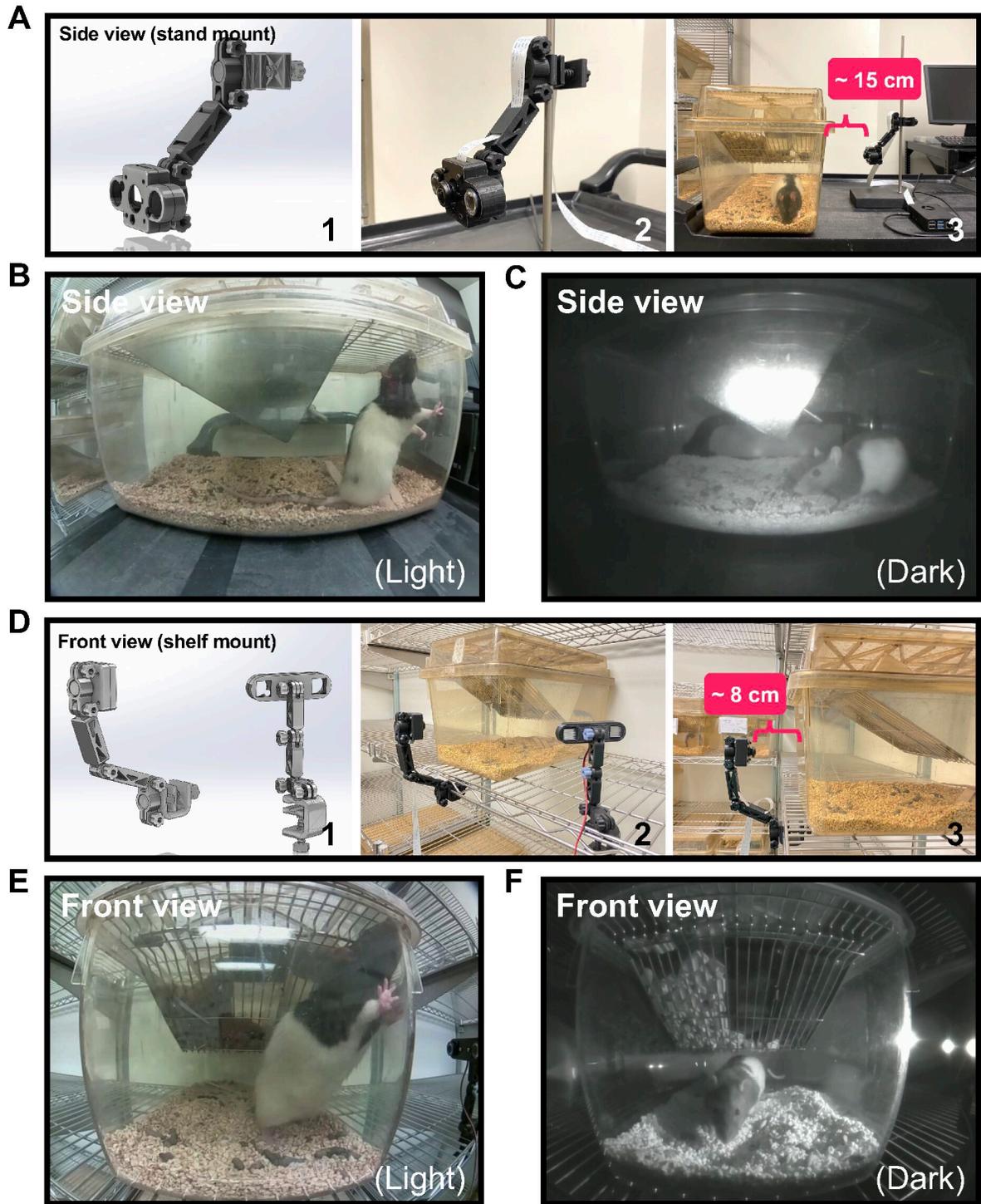
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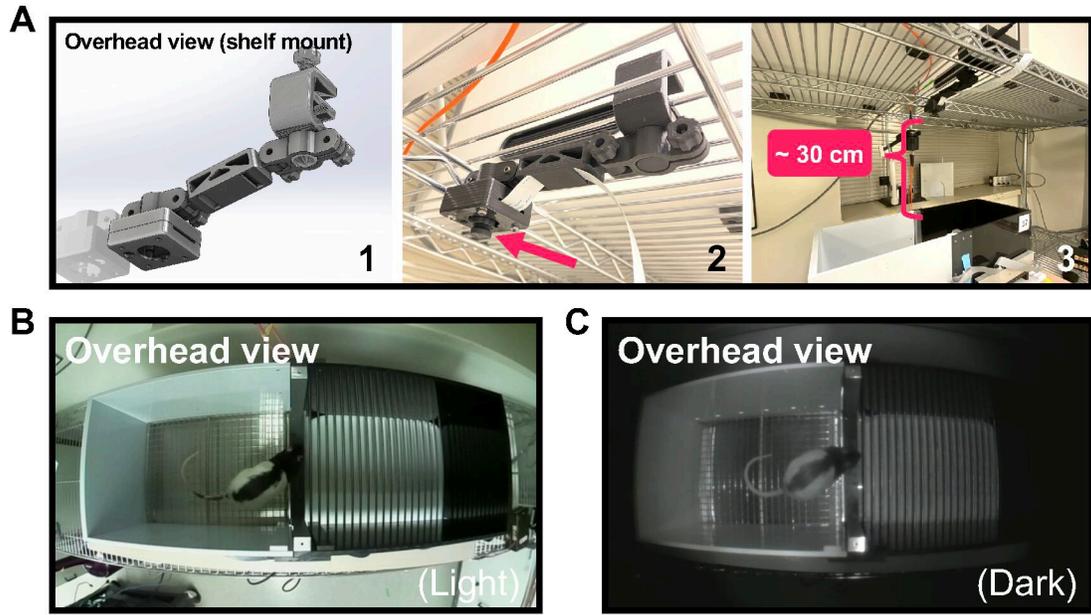


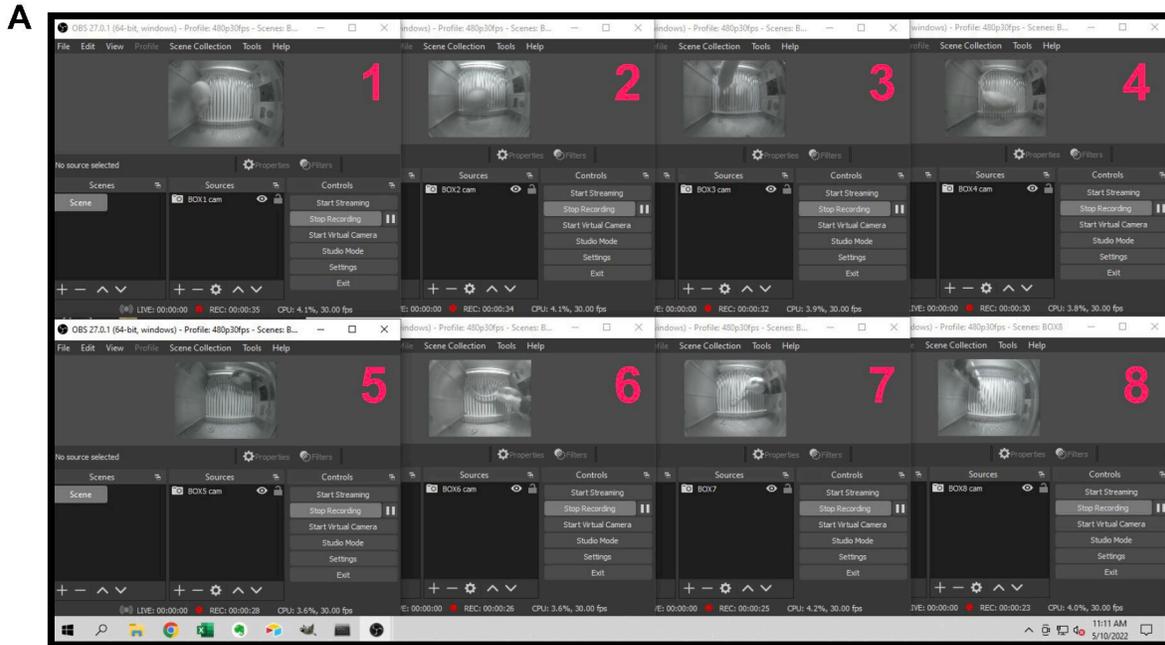












B

Task Manager

File Options View

Processes Performance App history Startup Users Details Services

Name	Status	44% CPU	15% Memory	2% Disk	0% Network	Power usage	Power usage t...
> OBS Studio (2)		5.8%	67.8 MB	0.2 MB/s	0 Mbps	Moderate	Very low
> OBS Studio (2)		5.4%	69.8 MB	0.8 MB/s	0 Mbps	Moderate	Very low
> OBS Studio (2)		5.4%	61.2 MB	0.3 MB/s	0 Mbps	Moderate	Very low
> OBS Studio (2)		5.3%	60.7 MB	0.2 MB/s	0 Mbps	Moderate	Very low
> OBS Studio (2)		5.0%	68.1 MB	0.3 MB/s	0 Mbps	Moderate	Very low
> OBS Studio (2)		4.8%	62.0 MB	0.2 MB/s	0 Mbps	Low	Very low
> OBS Studio (2)		4.5%	61.2 MB	0.5 MB/s	0 Mbps	Low	Very low
> OBS Studio (2)		4.3%	66.4 MB	0.5 MB/s	0 Mbps	Low	Very low

C

Device specifications 1

Device name [REDACTED]

Processor Intel(R) Xeon(R) CPU W3670 @ 3.20GHz 3.20 GHz

Installed RAM 20.0 GB

Device ID [REDACTED]

Product ID [REDACTED]

System type 64-bit operating system, x64-based processor

Pen and touch No pen or touch input is available for this display

Copy

Device Manager 2

File Action View Help

Universal Serial Bus controllers

- ASMedia USB 3.1 eXtensible Host Controller - 1.10 (Microsoft)
- ASMedia USB 3.1 eXtensible Host Controller - 1.10 (Microsoft)
- Intel(R) ICH10 Family USB Enhanced Host Controller - 3A3A
- Intel(R) ICH10 Family USB Enhanced Host Controller - 3A3C
- Intel(R) ICH10 Family USB Universal Host Controller - 3A34
- Intel(R) ICH10 Family USB Universal Host Controller - 3A35
- Intel(R) ICH10 Family USB Universal Host Controller - 3A36
- Intel(R) ICH10 Family USB Universal Host Controller - 3A37
- Intel(R) ICH10 Family USB Universal Host Controller - 3A38
- Intel(R) ICH10 Family USB Universal Host Controller - 3A39

Product	Vendor	Catalog Number	Price	Comment
RASPBERRY PI BOARD:				
Raspberry Pi 4 Model B (1/2/4/8GB)	anywhere	n/a	\$35 - 75	Can be purchased as a kit with accessories at a higher cost
CAMERA MODULE:				
Arducam Wide Angle Day-Night Vision for Raspberry Pi Camera (FOV: 170° [D] x 140° [H])	UCTRONICS https://bit.ly/39PKPH8	B003507	\$32.99	
ACCESSORIES:				
MicroSD Card (16GB)	PiShop.us https://bit.ly/38Nc45c	936	\$7.95	Any microSD card with a minimum storage space of 64MB would work
Raspberry Pi 4 Compatible Heavy-Duty Aluminum Alloy Case with Pre-installed Ready to Connect Fan	Vilros https://bit.ly/3GnbelQ	VILP015	\$14.99	Any case with camera ribbon cable and GPIO access would work; Metal cases with pre-installed cooling fan would be preferred to prevent overheating of the Raspberry Pi board
Standard USB to USB-C Cable (6ft)	Vilros https://bit.ly/3alpw0C	VILP103	\$4.99	Any USB-C type cable capable of data transferring
Jumper Cable Pin Header Connector Housing Assortment Kit	Amazon https://amzn.to/3z3Z0mu	B077X8XV2J	\$12.98	For wiring the IR LED boards to use them independently of the camera board
Ring Terminal, Non Insulated, 22-16 Wire Size, #4 Stud Size	Amazon https://amzn.to/3LKqUH9	B005GDFMSG	\$11.23	For wiring the IR LED boards to use them independently of the camera board
Red Black 2 Pin Wires 22 AWG (100ft)	Amazon https://amzn.to/3wJhvnN	B0793N3WZZ	\$18.99	For wiring the IR LED boards to use them independently of the camera board
Heat Shrink Tubing Kit	Jameco https://bit.ly/3NxH5bX	2095963	\$17.95	For wiring the IR LED boards to use them independently of the camera board
Crimping Tool Set	Amazon https://amzn.to/38Fy1mR	B0045CUMLQ	\$66.74	For wiring the IR LED boards to use them independently of the camera board
Wire Stripper	Grainger https://bit.ly/3MOaMps	1XFZ6	\$34.25	For wiring the IR LED boards to use them independently of the camera board
4-Port USB PCIe Card	CDW https://bit.ly/3aoX6Tz	6409687	\$114.99	For expanding the total USB bandwidth of the host computer during multi-camera recording

STL file	Picture
CAMERA CASE:	
Pi_Cam_Case_Top	
Pi_Cam_Case_Bottom_w_Rod	
Pi_Cam_w_LED_Case_Top	
Pi_Cam_w_LED_Case_Bottom_w_Rod	
CAMERA MOUNT TOOLS:	
Pi_Cam_Arm_7CM_M2F	
Pi_Cam_Arm_7CM_M2M_90D	
Pi_Cam_Arm_7CM_M2M_180D	
Pi_Cam_Ring_90D	
Pi_Cam_Ring_180D	
Pi_Cam_Rod_Base	

STL file	Picture
IR LED CASE:	
Pi_LED_Case_Top	
Pi_LED_Case_Bottom_w_Mount	
IR LED MOUNT TOOLS:	
Pi_LED_Arm_5CM_M2F	
Pi_LED_Base	
Pi_LED_Ring_180D	
ACCESSORIES:	
M2.5_Nut_Knob	
G-Clamp_Clamp	
G-Clamp_Screw	
G-Clamp_Press	

Camera	Lighting condition	Recording length (s)	Video file length (s)	Target FPS	True FPS	Total dropped frames	Dropped frames per min
Commercial	Red house light	300.56 ± 6.08	124.77 ± 2.52	20	8.30 ± 0.00	3515.00 ± 71.25	702.00 ± 0.00
Pi USB cam	Red house light	300.60 ± 6.09	300.54 ± 6.09	20	20.00 ± 0.00	0.00 ± 0.00	0.00 ± 0.00
Commercial	White house light	311.05 ± 4.39	179.57 ± 17.43	20	11.57 ± 1.16	2628.60 ± 377.60	505.60 ± 69.40
Pi USB cam	White house light	311.02 ± 4.41	310.96 ± 4.40	20	20.00 ± 0.00	0.00 ± 0.00	0.00 ± 0.00

Camera	Lighting condition	Recording length (s)	Target FPS	True FPS	Total duplicate frames	Duplicate frames per min
Commercial	Red house light	301.29 ± 3.81	30	8.28 ± 0.01	6545.20 ± 83.92	1303.40 ± 0.24
Pi USB cam	Red house light	301.18 ± 4.09	30	30.00 ± 0.00	0.00 ± 0.00	0.00 ± 0.00
Commercial	White house light	300.37 ± 3.77	30	8.33 ± 0.02	6509.00 ± 79.33	1300.20 ± 1.20
Pi USB cam	White house light	300.65 ± 3.47	30	30.00 ± 0.00	0.00 ± 0.00	0.00 ± 0.00