AstroLink 4 Pi v.3

astrojolo.com @2022

Rev. 1.3

Main features:

- Raspberry Pi* 4 based astroimaging control center
- dedicated *AstroLink 4 Pi* INDI driver
- focuser motor control for *Robofocus*, *Moonlite*, or generic unipolar or bipolar stepper motor
- up to 1/32 micro-stepping control with 2.0A maximum current and 1.4A maximum continuous hold current
- Temperature, humidity, sky temperature / cloud coverage sensors
- Real-time clock embedded
- permanent focuser position – no need to park focuser after the session
- 2 adjustable PWM power outputs to control dew heaters, telescope fans, or custom Peltier coolers. The maximum load is 40W per output
- 2 switchable power outputs to power mount, cameras, or filter wheels. The maximum load is 5A per output
- 1 additional permanent power output
- 1 additional adjustable 3-10V output
- XT60 high current input voltage socket

Technical data

- dimensions: 137x83x32mm
- weight: 235g (Raspberry Pi* 4 module installed)
- the maximum current drawn from all outputs: 10A
- AstroLink power consumption: 6W max
- regulated PWM outputs: 40W max
- permanent 12V DC output: 5A max
- switchable 12V DC outputs: 5A max
- focuser stepper motor outputs: RJ12 6 pin, 2.0A max
- adjustable output: 2A maximum peak load, 1.5A continuous load
- RJ9 4 pin socket for sensors

WARNING!

Do not connect or disconnect stepper motor when power is on. It may damage stepper motor controller.

Make sure the stepper hold torque is set to 0% before replacing stepper motor with motor of different type.

Do not cover ventilation slits at the enclosure sides and back.

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Device overview

System and hardware requirements

AstroLink 4 Pi requires a Raspberry Pi* 4 module to be installed. Module with 4GB of RAM is recommended. *AstroLink 4 Pi* has been designed to work under the control of the dedicated *AstroLink 4 Pi* INDI driver, which is available at https://github.com/astrojolo/astrolink4pi . Astroberry system is recommended, however any working Linux distribution that supports INDI drivers system will work. Good quality 32GB or larger card is recommended (Class 10 at least). Most of the Raspberry Pi *problems come from a poor quality power supply or SD card.

PWM outputs

AstroLink 4 Pi has two RCA outputs that provide PWM (pulse width modulation) regulated signal. Regulations cover the full 0-100% range. These outputs are usually used for powering dew cap heaters. Output can be regulated using controls in the dedicated INDI driver panel. PWM cycle frequency can be set in the INDI driver options in the range 10-1000Hz. Default output value at the connection can be defined.

Switchable 12V DC outputs

The device contains two switchable DC outputs, that may provide a supply voltage for imaging setup components (camera, mount, etc). Output can be switched using controls in the dedicated INDI driver panel. Default output value at the connection can be defined.

Focusing motors control

The focusing motor can be controlled with *AstroLink 4 Pi* device. The focusing stepper motor can be connected to the 6 pins RJ12 socket (see Figure 5). It supports 12V unipolar motors with gearboxes and bipolar motors at any microstepping resolution in a range of full step to 1/32. The focusing motor can be controlled with a dedicated INDI driver panel and via the *INDI* focuser interface. Depending on the *AstroLink 4 Pi* revision, the stepper motor current is adjusted with a potentiometer, or in the INDI control panel. Setting holding power is also possible. For unipolar geared motors it is highly recommended to set holding power to zero, so the motor will not overheat.

Permanent 12V DC output

This output is connected directly to the input 12V XT60 socket. Can be used to provide power to a mini PC or any other device powered with 12V.

Adjustable DC output

Internal switching converter provides regulated voltage in a 3-10V range that can be used to power any peripheral devices (DSLR, USB hub, etc.) Voltage can be adjusted with a 2mm flat screwdriver using a small potentiometer.

Sensors

AstroLink 4 Pi can be connected with temperature, humidity and sky temperature / cloud coverage sensors. The temperature reading is available in the dedicated INDI driver panel and can be used to perform temperature compensation of the focuser position. Temperature, humidty and sky temperature values are also available in the INDI Environment tab.

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External view

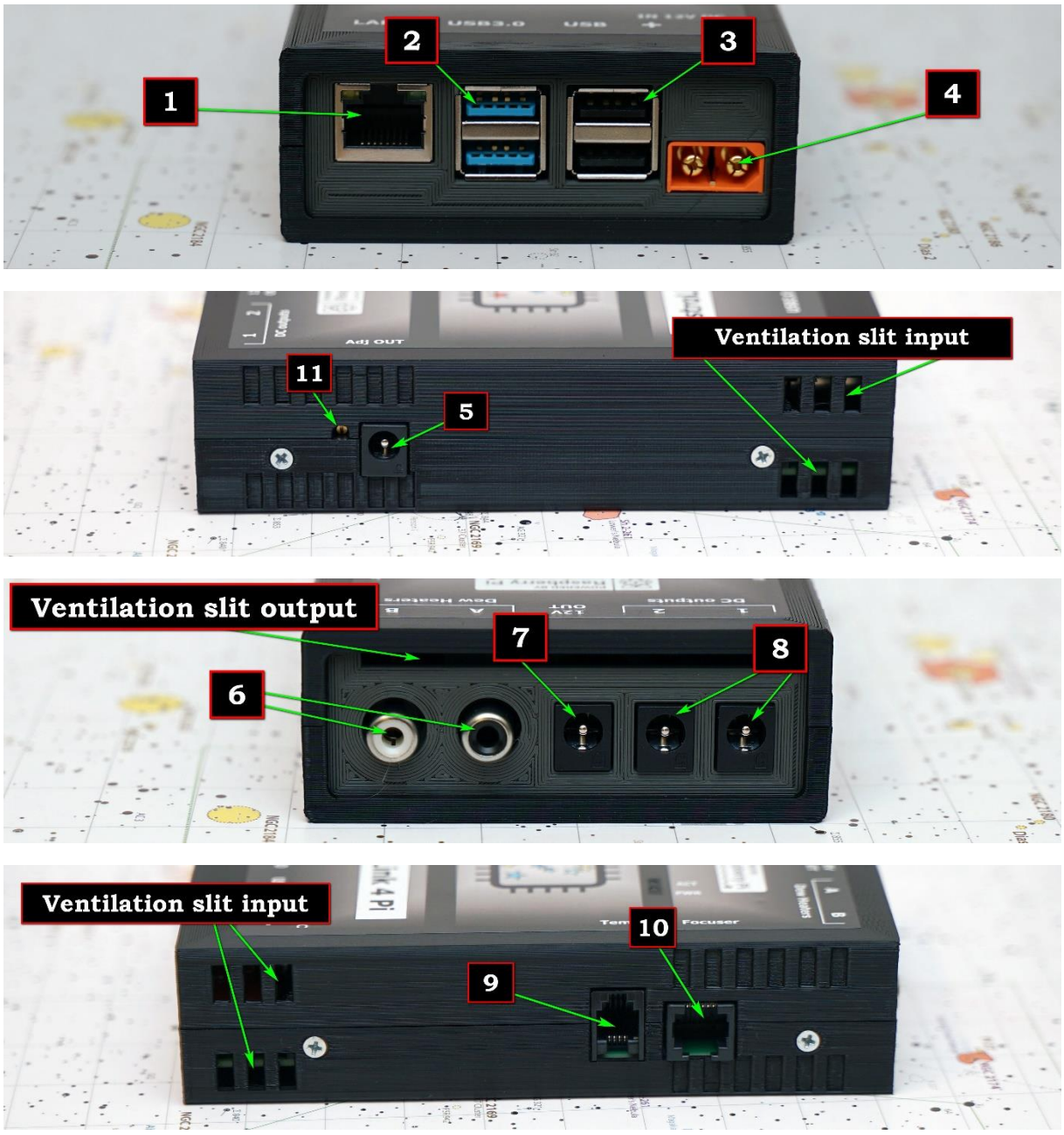

Figure 1 - external views

1. LAN port
2. USB3.0 ports
3. USB2.0 ports
4. XT60 power input (12V DC)
5. Regulated DC output (3-10V)
6. Regulated RCA outputs
7. 12V DC output (non-switchable)
8. Switchable 12V outputs
9. Temperature sensor input
10. Focusing motor output
11. Regulated DC output adjustment

Version comparison

Feature	Version 1	Version 2	Version 3
FOCUSING MOTOR CURRENT ADJUSTMENT	With potentiometer	In INDI panel	In INDI panel
RTC REAL-TIME CLOCK WITH COIN BATTERY	Not available	Available	Available
SUPPORTED SENSORS	DS1820 temperature sensor	DS1820 temperature sensor	SHT temperature and humidity sensor MLX sky temperature / cloud coverage sensor

RTC battery replacement

AstroLink 4 Pi revision (version) is displayed in the log window after clicking Connect button

CR2032 battery that is used to sustain real-time clock should work several years. If you notice that after switching on the device time is not set properly it may indicate that battery needs replacement. You need to open the device (see *Hardware Setup* section), remove the Raspberry Pi* module and you will see the battery holder. Remove the battery and insert the new one. Make sure the polarity is correct. Refer to the *Software installation* chapter for setting up and synchronizing the time.

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Hardware setup

Raspberry Pi* installation

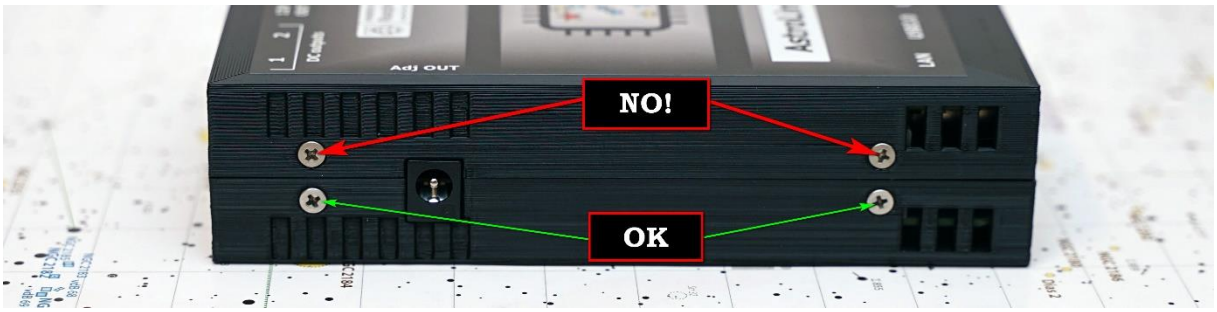

Figure 2 - enclosure screws

Installing the Raspberry Pi* module requires opening the *AstroLink 4 Pi* enclosure. You need to unscrew four out of eight screws at the device's sides. Please remove only bottom screws. Then remove enclosure top. After that, you need to unplug the cooling fan.

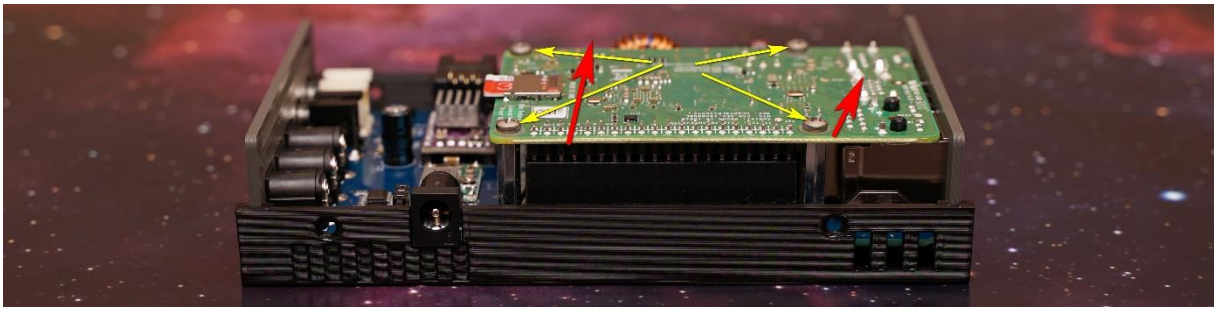

Figure 3 - Raspberry Pi module fixing screws

Then remove four screws that fix the Raspberry Pi* module and place the module in the device. Watch the proper position of the GPIO socket pins. Put the Raspberry Pi* front sockets into the holes in the front device panel and push the pins down to the GPIO socket. Then fix the Raspberry Pi* module with four screws, connect the fan (refer to Figure 4 for the fan polarity), and mount the top part of the enclosure. The last step is to put back four screws at the device's sides.

To unmount the Raspberry Pi* module just do all these steps in the reverse order.

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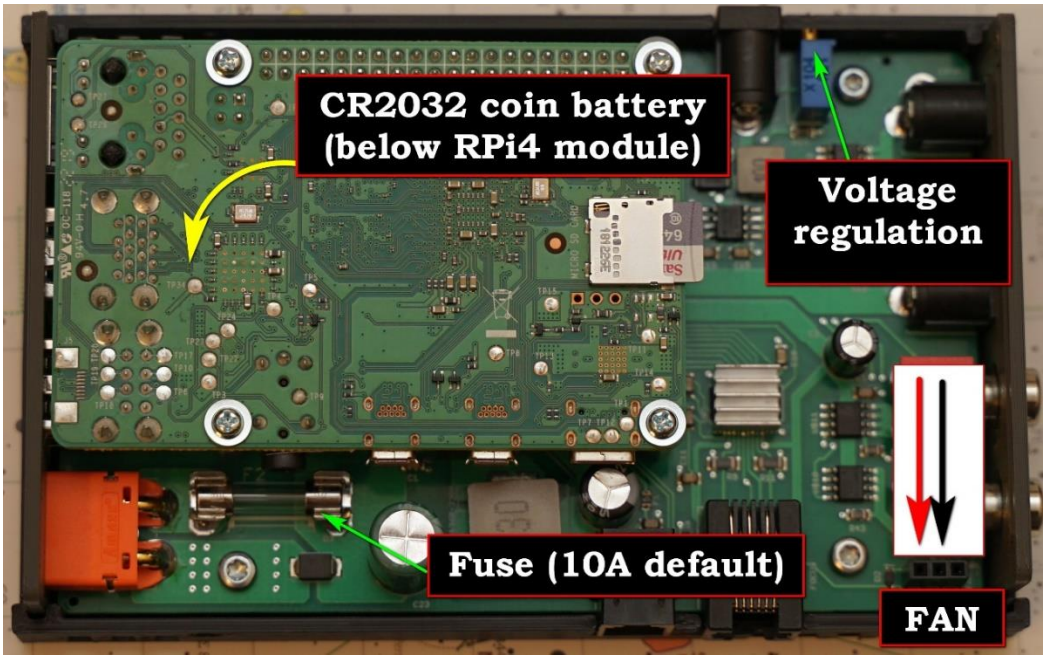


Figure 4 - AstroLink 4 Pi interior (version 3)

Focusing motor output

The stepper motor current is regulated with an option *Stepper current* in the INDI panel.

The stepper motor socket pinout is presented in Figure 5.

Figure 5 - AstroLink 4 Pi focusing motor output

Required connections are listed in the table below.

pin	unipolar	bipolar
1	COMMON	NOT CONNECTED
2	COMMON	NOT CONNECTED
3	COIL A	COIL A
4	COIL A’	COIL A’
5	COIL B	COIL B
6	COIL B’	COIL B’

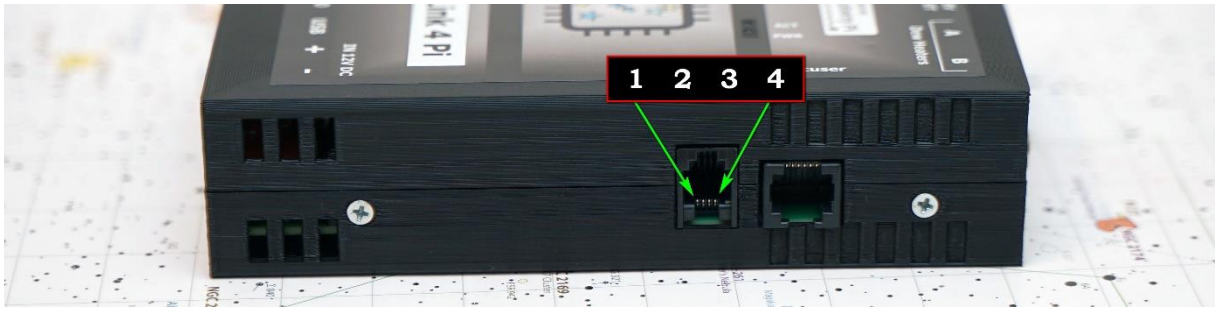
Setting the regulated output voltage

The voltage at the regulated output can be adjusted using a small potentiometer next to the output The regulated output voltage can be set in the range of 3 to 10V. Use a multimeter connected to the regulated voltage output to control the actual voltage value.

Disconnect any device from the regulated voltage output before you start the voltage adjustment operation!

Connecting temperature sensor

AstroLink 4 Pi v.3 supports temperature/humidity and sky temperature/cloud coverage sensors. Sensor socket pinout is presented below. If you want to use more than one sensor, you need to have sensor signal splitter (sold separately).



RJ9 socket	
1	Vcc (3.3V)
2	SCL
3	SDA
4	GND

Software installation

System setup

The recommended software is the *Astroberry* system that can be downloaded at the site https://www.astroberry.io/. *Astroberry* installation procedure is described there in detail. After the first run, you need to update WiFi settings and connect to the home wireless network and update the system. Do not remove the default astroberry WiFi hotspot, that is used as a failover if it cannot connect to any other configured networks.

After that step, two more actions are required. Open *Raspberry Pi Configuration* and in the *Interfaces* tab enable *1-Wire* – this is required to read data from the temperature sensor. Then in the *Performance* tab enable the *Fan* section, and select GPIO pin to 13. Then adjust the temperature when the internal fan starts to work. The recommended setting is 60-70C – to be on the safe side. When the CPU reaches that temperature the cooling fan will be switched on.

All these actions above are not required when you purchase *AstroLink 4 Pi* device with the preconfigured system.

INDI driver installation

AstroLink 4 Pi INDI driver is available at the https://github.com/astrojolo/astrolink4pi page. Required installation steps are listed in the README file.

If you have a fresh SD card with an astroberry system, then it is worth updating the system with the command

```
sudo apt update && sudo apt upgrade && sudo apt dist-upgrade
```

Download and install required libraries before compiling AstroLink 4 Pi driver. See the INDI site for more details. In most cases it's enough to run:

```
sudo apt-get install cmake libindi-dev libgpiod-dev
```

You also need to enable pigpiod daemon, which is preinstalled with astroberry, but not enabled at startup:

```
sudo systemctl enable pigpiod
```

and restart the device. Then you can download and compile the driver:

```
git clone https://github.com/astrojolo/astrolink4pi
cd astrolink4pi
mkdir build && cd build
cmake -DCMAKE_INSTALL_PREFIX=/usr ..
make
```

Or update to latest version:

```
cd ~/astrolink4pi/build/

git pull

cmake -DCMAKE_INSTALL_PREFIX=/usr ..

make
```

You can install the drivers by running:

```
sudo make install
```

Real-Time clock enabling - only version 2

To enable automatic synchronization of the RTC embedded in version 2 of AstroLink 4 Pi you need to edit the file

```
sudo nano /etc/rc.local
```

and add the following line before `exit 0` statement at the file end

```
echo ds1307 0x68 > /sys/class/i2c-adapter/i2c-1/new_device
```

After restart, the astroberry system time will be synchronized with the embedded DS1307 clock.

Driver installation is not required when you purchase *AstroLink 4 Pi* device with the preconfigured system.

INDI driver configuration

The configuration below will be presented for Kstars/EKOS system.

The first step is to create a new hardware profile. Click plus icon next to the profile selector and fill it with all the equipment you have. As one of the *Aux* devices select *AstroLink 4 Pi*. Then click *Save*.

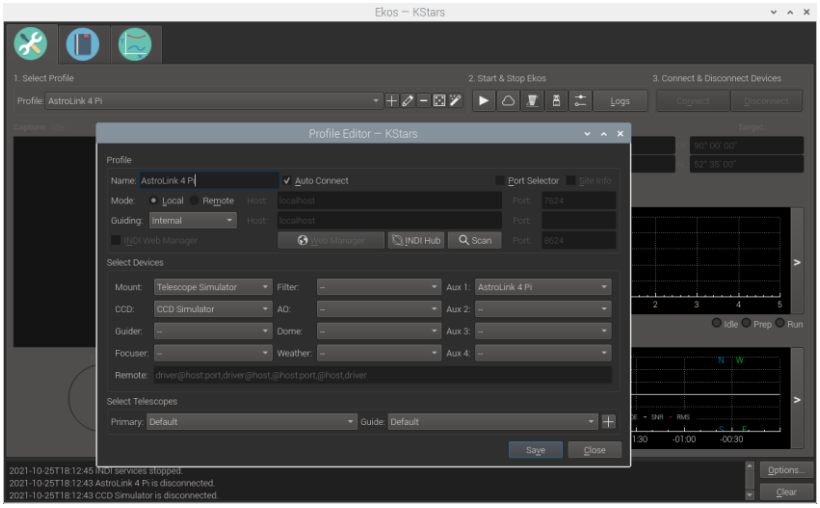


Figure 6- EKOS profile editor

After that, you should be able to start the EKOS with the play button, and *INDI Control Panel* should be opened. If you close *INDI Control Panel* by mistake, it can be always opened with the button with the INDI logo.

AstroLink 4 Pi control panel contains several tabs.

Main Control

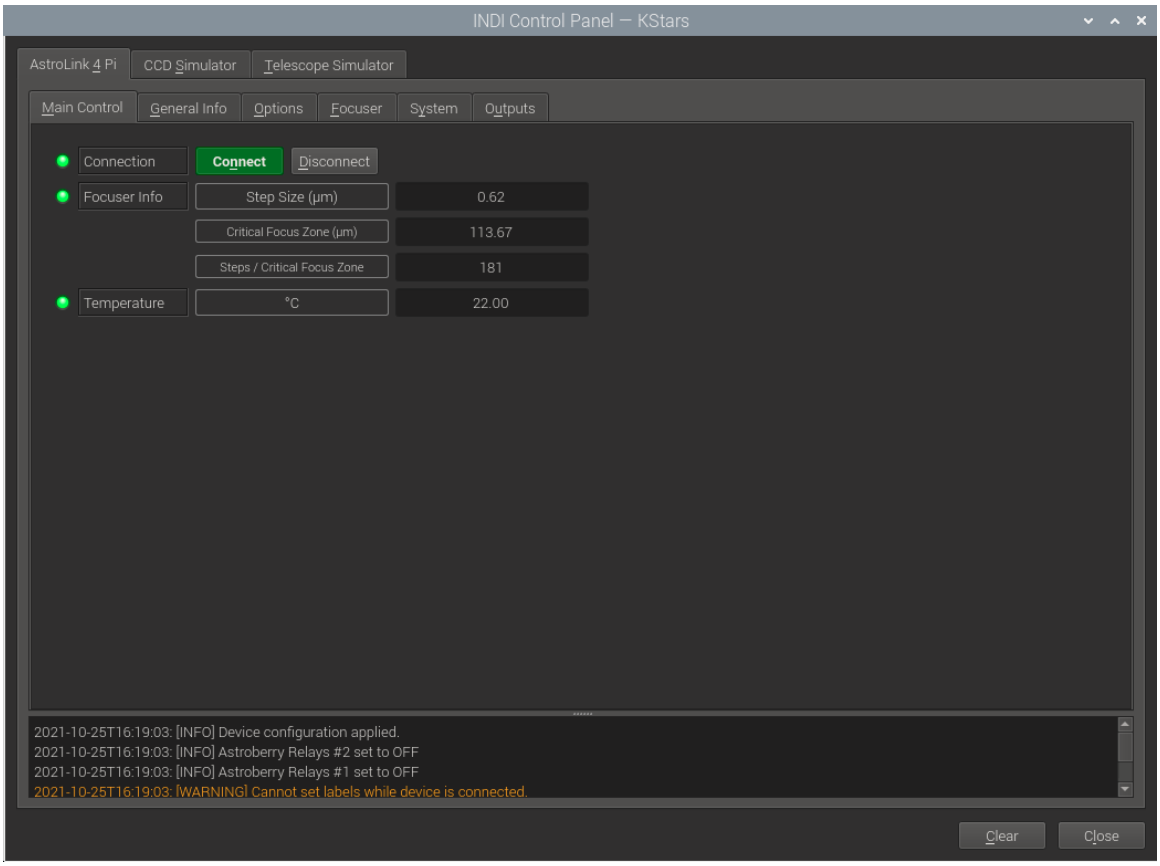


Figure 7 - Main Control

Here you can *Connect* or *Disconnect* from the *AstroLink 4 Pi device* using standard buttons.

Focuser info section contains information about step size and critical focus zone. These values are calculated from focuser configuration data and *Telescope* device data (aperture and focal length).

If the temperature sensor is connected to AstroLink 4 Pi device, then the *Temperature* section is present and the current temperature is displayed here. When temperature reading is available, also temperature compensation is possible.

General Info tab contains some basing information about the driver. None of these fields is editable.

Options

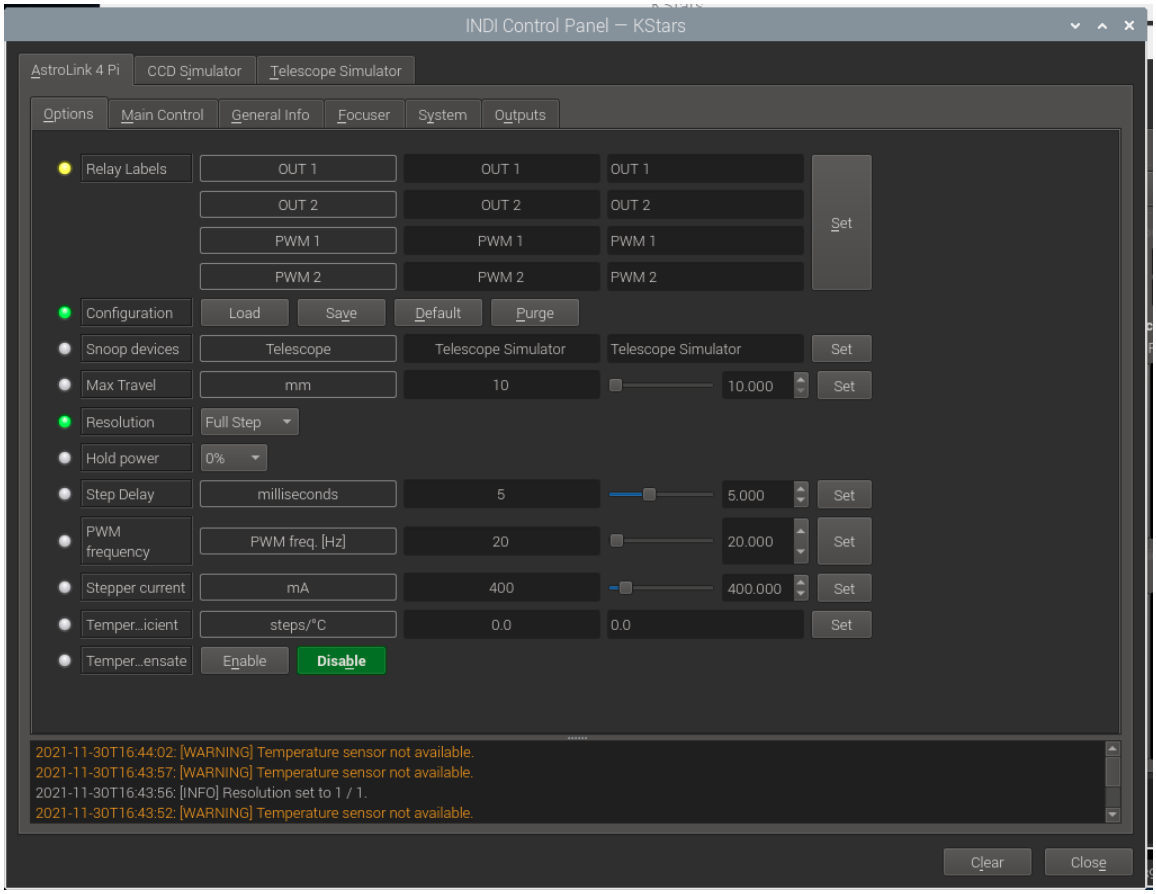


Figure 8- Options tab

Configuration – here you can load, save, reset or purge the INDI driver configuration.

PWM frequency – that is the frequency of the regulated PWM outputs power.

Relay labels – these are names of the outputs, that are shown for convenience in the Output tab.

Step delay – time in milliseconds of each focusing motor step. Should be adjusted to the focusing motor parameters and selected resolution.

Stepper current [mA] – focusing stepper current in milliamperes. Refer to the motor datasheet to set the correct value. For 12V geared unipolar motors set 350 or 400mA here. Stepper current in version 1 of AstroLink 4 Pi must be set with the potentiometer (see *Hardware setup*)

Snoop device – that is telescope device name that will be used to retrieve aperture and focal length data.

Max travel – that is the maximum output position of the focuser. This value is used to calculate the step size.

Resolution – here required focusing motor resolution can be selected. For unipolar geared motors 1/1 to 1/8 resolution is recommended. For bipolar motors, without an additional gearbox 1/16 or 1/32 is recommended.

Hold power – here you select the holding power of the focusing motor. For unipolar motors, it should be set to 0 to avoid motor overheating. For bipolar stepper motors should be set to some significant value, so the balance between the motor temperature on idle and holding torque will be preserved. Recommended values are 40-60%.

Temperature coefficient – when the temperature sensor is available, temperature compensation may be performed. The number of steps per one degree of the temperature change should be entered into this field.

Temperature compensate – enable or disable temperature compensation. The temperature compensation cycle is 30 seconds.

Focuser

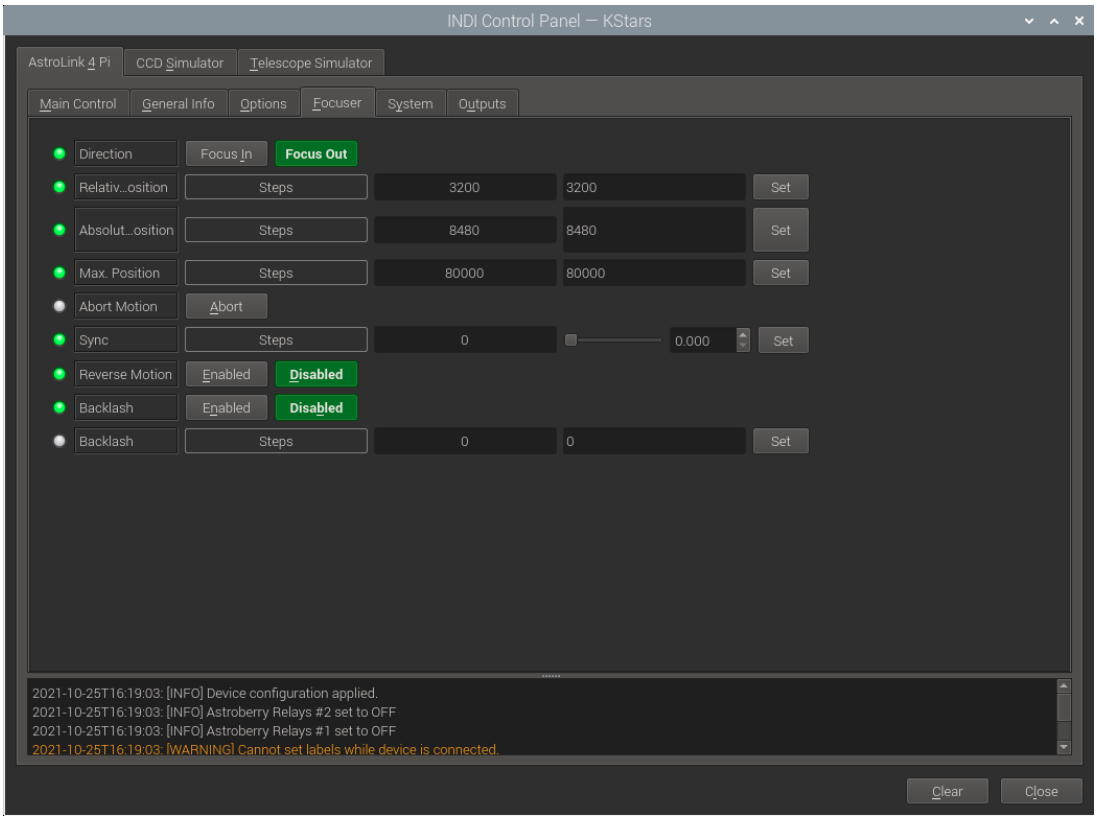


Figure 9- Focuser tab

Direction – controls the direction of the Relative position move

Relative position – allows moving the focuser by the specific amount of steps

Absolute position – allows moving the focuser to the specific position in steps

Max Position – this is the maximum outward position of the focuser in steps

Abort Motion – stop focusing motor movement immediately

Sync - synchronizes current focuser position to the specific amount of steps

Reverse Motion – reverses focuser motion, so In direction becomes Out. This setting depends on your focuser mechanics

Backlash – implements backlash correction

System

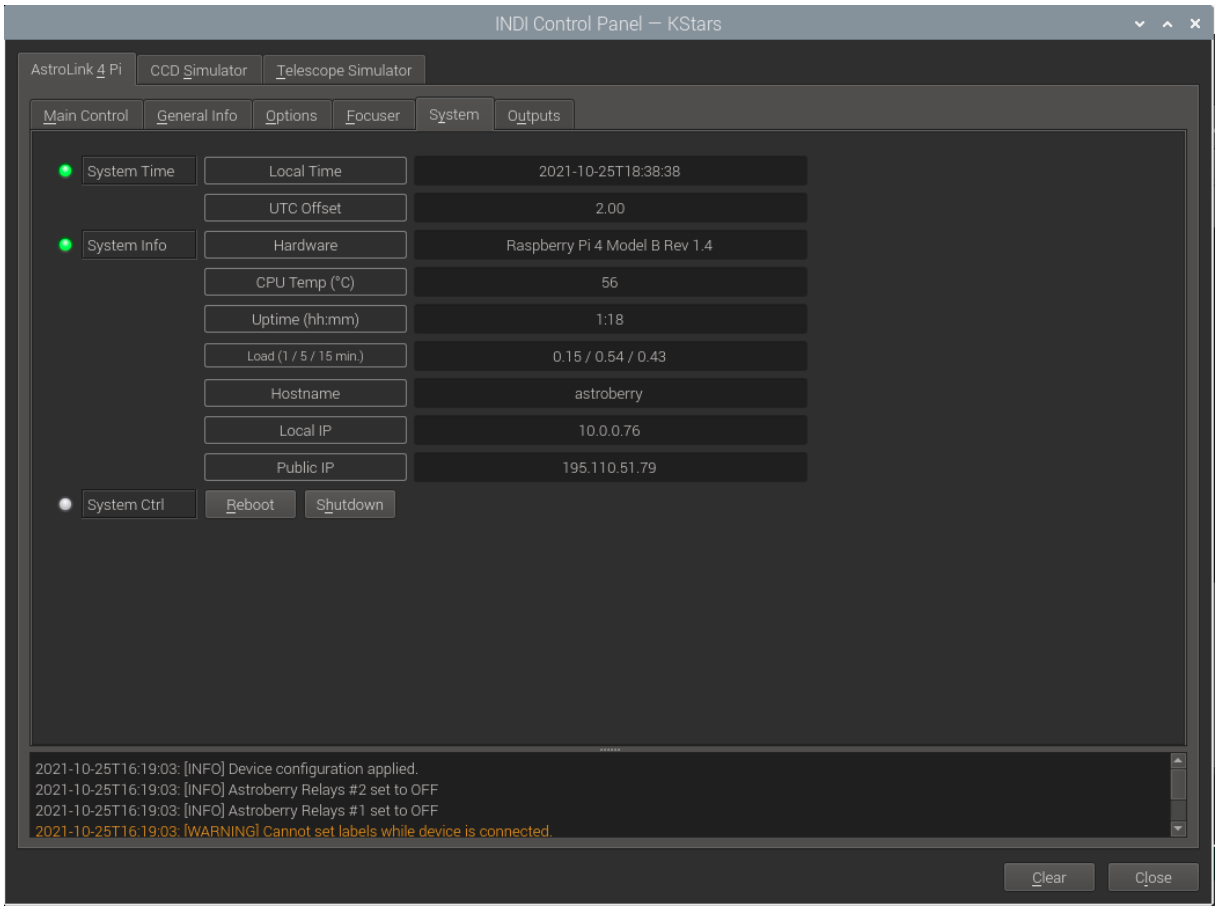


Figure 10- System tab

This tab contains several read-only fields with some information about the system. *System Ctrl* section allows to reboot or turn off the operating system, but to use these buttons some additional configuration of sudo is required, so these operations are allowed without a password.

Outputs

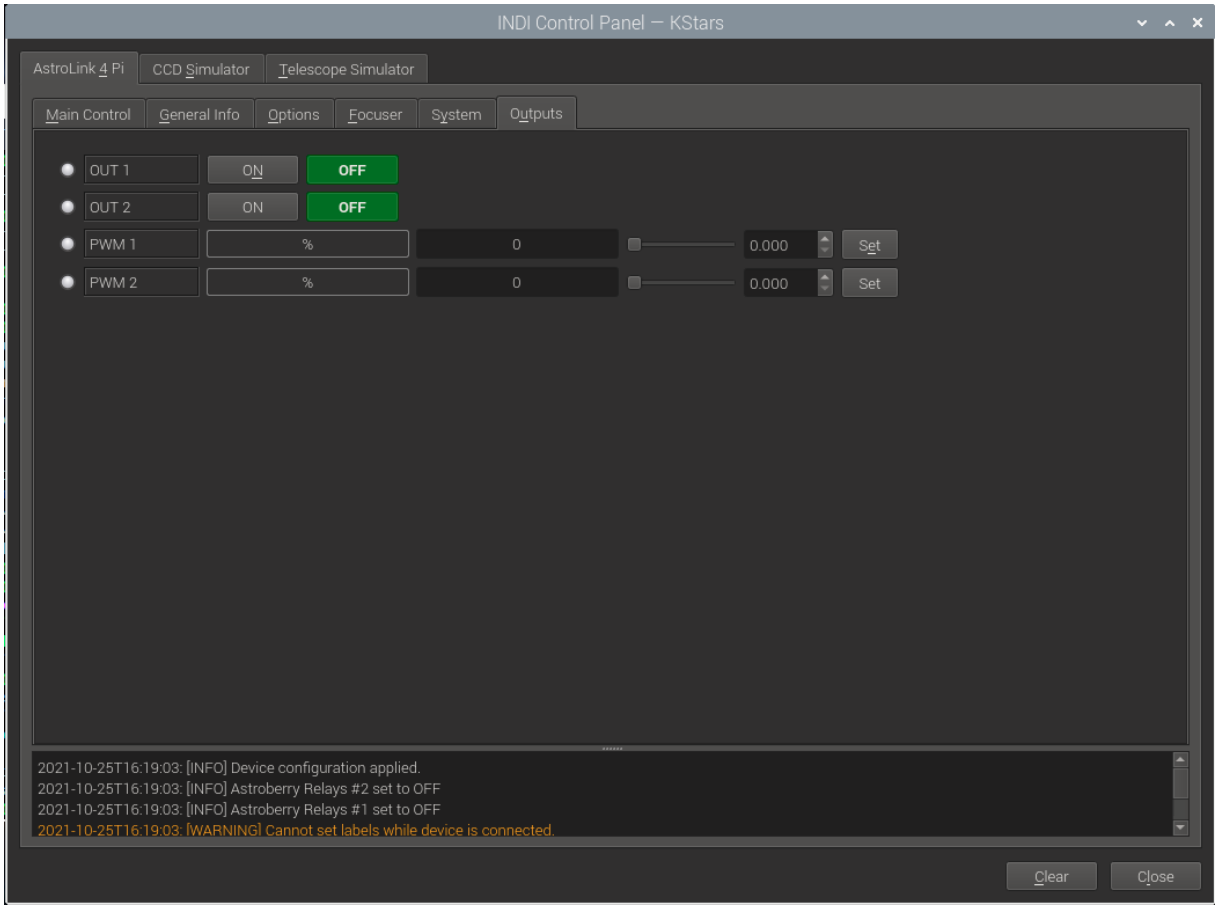
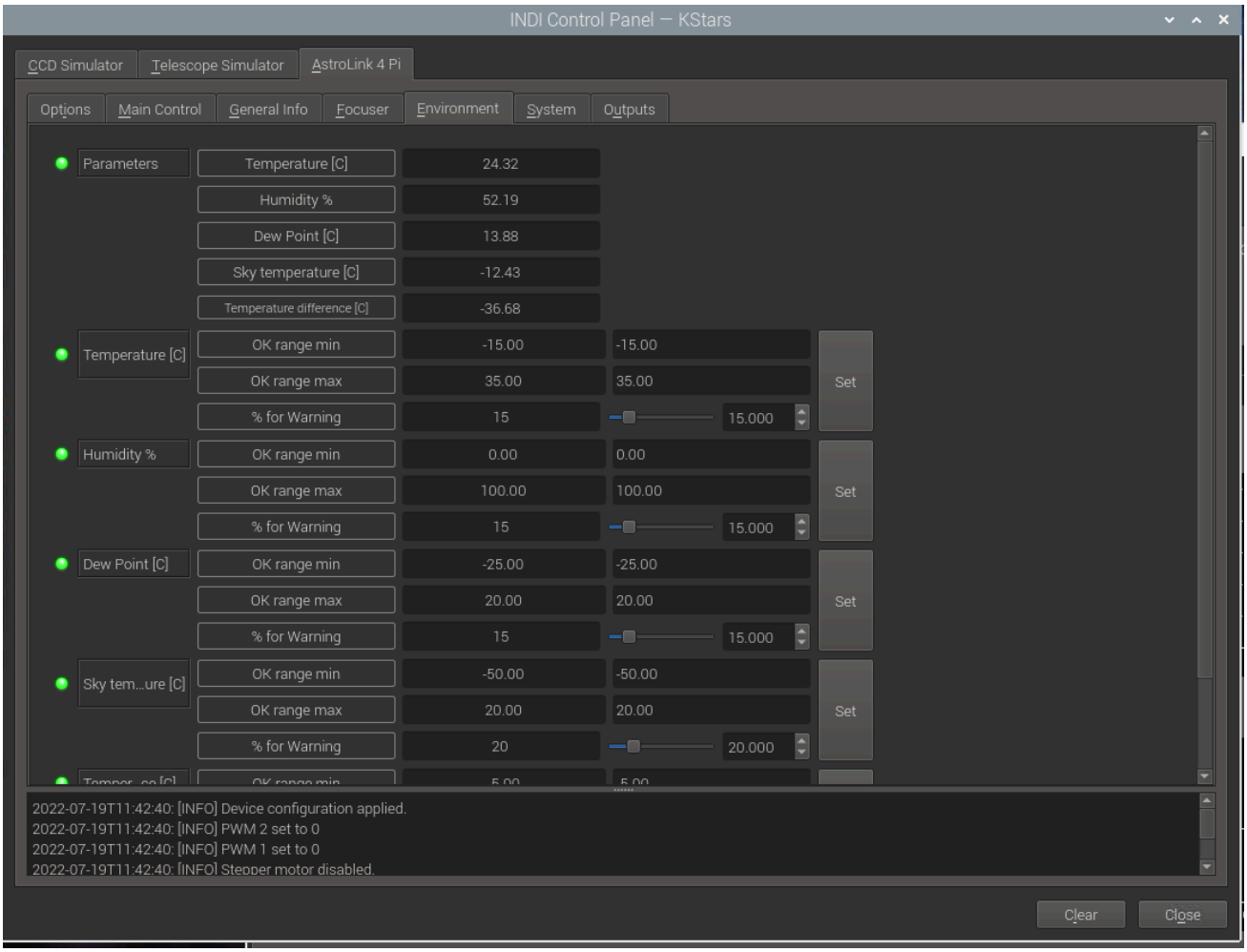


Figure 11- Outputs tab

Outputs tab contains controls for operating with external power sockets of the *AstroLink 4 Pi* device. There are three DC 12V outputs in the device. One is permanent, and two are switchable and can be controlled in this panel. There are also two RCA sockets in the *AstroLink 4 Pi* that can be used for powering dew cap heaters. These sockets provide PWM regulation (the frequency can be set in the *Options* tab) in the range of 0 to 100%.

Default values for the outputs can be saved in the *Options* tab. Once saved, these values will be restored on the next connection to the driver.

Environment tab



Environment tab presents data collected from the connected sensors. Currently temperature / humidity / dewpoint sensor and sky temperature / cloud coverage sensor are supported.

Temperature compensation

Temperature compensation in *AstroLink 4 Pi* is implemented linearly. So there is only one parameter that describes how temperature affects the focus point. It is not a perfect approach, however, its accuracy is good enough for most amateur setups.

How to determine the temperature compensation coefficient?

The best way is to note the focuser position at different temperatures. When during session temperature changes, the focuser position needs to be adjusted to maintain a sharp focus. When you note these points of temperature and corresponding focuser position, then it is pretty straightforward to calculate the compensation coefficient, i.e. the number of focuser steps required to compensate for one-degree temperature change. And this value needs to be entered into the *Temperature coefficient* field in the *Options* tab. When decreasing temperature requires the focuser position to decrease, then the value will be positive.

How to use compensation?

Once you enter the compensation value into the *Temperature coefficient* field, you need also to enable the compensation. Actual compensation is performed once the calculated focuser position correction is larger than half of the critical focus zone. CFZ value is calculated and presented at the *Main control* tab.

Ground loops

The ground loop in the electrical system occurs when two points that should have the same potential have different voltages. The ground loop in the astroimaging setup may occur when the ground (i.e. minus of power supply voltage) is connected to one receiver with more than one cable path. Here are two example scenarios:

Scenario one

- the newtonian telescope has a mirror cooling fan, and this mirror fan socket is fixed in the metal mirror cell. Its minus is connected to a metal telescope tube
- the imaging camera case is also connected to the power supply minus.

Now, when you power both fan and camera from the same power supply, then the power supply ground will be connected to the camera with power supply cable, but also via the fan power socket, then metal telescope tube, focuser, and camera case.

Scenario two

- an active USB hub is powered from the regulated voltage output from AstroLink
- imaging camera is powered from DC AstroLink output
- the camera is connected to a USB hub with a cable

In this scenario, a negative voltage is supplied to the camera also in two ways. The first one is the main power cable between the camera and AstroLink. The second loop is from 5V output in AstroLink to the USB hub and then with the USB cable to the camera.

The ground loop may cause some problems with connections, that are hard to investigate. The best way is to avoid them. Possible solutions for the second scenario are:

- connect the imaging camera to the computer without an additional USB hub
- power camera from a separate supply
- power USB hub from a separate supply
- do not power the USB hub at all - maybe it is not required
- use a USB cable with galvanic isolation

Tips and troubleshooting

I cannot find the device in my network

Make sure it is powered for at least two minutes, so it booted up properly and is connected to the WiFi network.

Use some local area network tool to scan and find the IP address of the Raspberry module (like *Fing* for Android phones).

Make sure you have updated Raspberry Pi* module WiFi settings properly. If it cannot connect to the home WiFi network, then it will start as a failover with its WiFi hotspot: SSID *astroberry*, password *astroberry*, IP 10.42.0.1.

If all above fails, then switch off the home router, so there is no WiFi around, and restart AstroLink 4 Pi. After about two minutes it should be *astroberry* WiFi available, where you can connect.

I have removed the default *astroberry* WiFi hotspot and now cannot connect at all

You need to open the *AstroLink 4 Pi* device and:

- remove SD card and reflash it with the fresh *astroberry* image. Then you will lose all data and configuration
- remove Raspberry Pi* 4 module from the device, connect keyboard, mouse, any screen, power with 5V and 2A power supply, and fix the WiFi configuration

The sensor is connected, but the temperature is not displayed

Make sure that the sensor was connected before switching on the power. Otherwise, it may not be detected and recognized.

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