

My question to ChatGPT

On May 16 I wish to photograph Western Grebes doing their mating display by running across the water at Salmon Arm, British Columbia. What are the best locations in Salmon Arm for seeing this, and what are the best times of the day to see the display?

The reply from ChatGPT

May 16 is actually an excellent date—you're right in the heart of the **Western Grebe courtship window** in Salmon Arm Bay, when the famous "rushing" (running across water) display is still very active.

Here's how to maximize your chances:

Best locations in Salmon Arm (very specific)

All of these overlook **Salmon Arm Bay**, which is one of the **most important Western Grebe breeding sites in British Columbia**.

1. Salmon Arm Wharf (Top choice)

- Consistently cited as the **best single vantage point**
- Lets you look out over **open water where pairs display**
- Elevated angle helps with photography (clean backgrounds, better tracking)

👉 Where to stand:

- About **2/3 of the way out**, not right at shore (less disturbance, wider view)

2. Peter Jannink Nature Park

- Boardwalk and shoreline access into the marsh edge
- Good for **closer birds**, especially early in the season
- Sometimes better for **behavior shots before the run starts**

3. Christmas Island (Salmon Arm Bay)

- Quieter, less crowded
- Often excellent for **colony activity and multiple pairs interacting**

4. Rotary Peace Park (shoreline alternative)

- Easy access, wide viewing area
- Good fallback if wind or light favours this angle

Best time of day (this matters more than location)

The “rushing” display is **unpredictable**, but strongly tied to calm conditions and social interaction between pairs.

Early morning (BEST overall)

- **~5:30 AM – 8:30 AM**
- Calm water = critical for the running display
- Birds are **most active and vocal**
- Best light direction (sun behind you from the wharf)

👉 This is your **highest probability window**

Evening (second best)

- **~6:30 PM – sunset**
- Activity often picks up again as winds drop
- Warm light, but shooting angles can be trickier

Midday (generally poor)

- Heat + wind = fewer displays
- Birds often loafing or feeding instead
- Even experienced photographers sometimes see **very little midday activity**

How to actually catch the “running” display

This is the part most people miss.

Watch for pre-display behavior

- Pairs facing each other, calling (“cree-cree”)
- Head shaking, synchronized dipping
- “Cat posture” (low, tense body)

👉 When you see this → **get ready immediately**

The run often starts within seconds.

Positioning tip

- Stay **50–150 m from birds** (ideal lens range: 400–800mm equivalent)
- Look for **pairs slightly away from the main raft**
- Multiple pairs displaying together increases odds



Timing for May 16 specifically

- You are in **peak courtship season (late April–June)**
- Water levels are rising → birds are still highly active socially
- Expect:
 - Many birds present
 - Frequent pre-display behavior
 - **Moderate but not guaranteed running events**

Practical photography advice (based on this location)

- Wind is your enemy → **check forecast for calm mornings**
- Use:
 - 1/2000+ shutter (they move fast)
 - Continuous AF + wide tracking
- Shoot slightly **wider than you think**—they accelerate suddenly

Bottom line

- **Go early morning to the Salmon Arm Wharf**
- Scan for **pairs interacting, not lone birds**
- Be patient—the run is brief but repeats throughout the morning