



# Black Vultures and Vehicle Damage at Monroe Lake

## What is the problem?

Black vultures, the gray-headed cousin of the Turkey Vulture, are causing damage on vehicles, often trucks and SUVs parked at boat ramps. Windshield wipers, sunroof seals, and rubber or vinyl parts are at particular risk.

Most of the time, perching black vultures do little or no damage. However, in some cases, the destruction can be extensive. The vultures can tear out rubber seals, peck pieces out of truck bed liners, and scratch paint with their claws.

## Why are they attacking vehicles?

The quick answer is that no one knows.

Black vultures are primarily scavengers that play an important in our local ecosystem, cleaning up dead and decaying animal carcasses. Rubber and vinyl certainly isn't a part of their natural diet, and they only rarely eat any of it. Typically, the material is simply discarded after it's ripped from the vehicle.



*A "committee" of black vultures perches on vehicles parked at Monroe Lake's Fairfax SRA boat ramp.*  
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Some have theorized that the smell of a certain chemical in the rubber might be attracting the birds. However, studies have not supported this, and it seems an unlikely answer given that black vultures have a terrible sense of smell.

Others have suggested that the behavior is social in nature. Perhaps the birds are simply filling time with their "committee" (a term used to describe a group of perched vultures), much like humans sometimes engage in meaningless activities while hanging out together in a group. Another possibility is that it could be connected to a ritualistic feeding behavior engaged in by young black vultures.

The reasons why black vultures choose to attack one vehicle over another are similarly obscure.

## Is there a solution?

A variety of tactics have been tried to discourage black vulture attacks on vehicles. The most common tactic is to discourage black vulture committees from congregating at key locations.

Thus far, problems at Monroe Lake have been concentrated at the Fairfax SRA ramp parking lots. Monroe Lake has removed snags (dead trees) to make this area less attractive for perching. Staff are also using "harassment" techniques, including firecrackers, laser lights, and pyrotechnics, to chase vultures from the area. However, while "harassment" can be effective over short periods, it isn't a good long-term solution. It is time consuming for staff and can create an unpleasant environment for visitors.

Lethal solutions to the problem have been offered for consideration. However, black vultures are occupying their natural habitat and are playing an important part in that ecosystem (when they aren't attacking vehicles!). They are also a protected species under the Migratory Bird Act, which severely limits control by lethal means.

## How can I protect my vehicle?



If you have a cover for your vehicle, use it. You can also rig an improvised cover using tarps and bungee cords, taking particular care to cover exposed rubber and vinyl parts. If you are also concerned about possible paint damage from the claws of perching vultures, you will want to ensure that the entire vehicle is covered.

If your vehicle sustains damage from black vulture activity, your recourse is to file a claim with your insurance company. You are also encouraged to report incidents to the Monroe Lake Office at Paynetown SRA (812-837-9546) to help the property more accurately track and assess the problem.