



WHERE IS YOUR GREAT OUTDOORS?

by Virginia Ranly, Director of Education



At play during an afternoon of Monkey Tail Gang

The great outdoors may be the wilderness of the mountains or the trails of The Schuylkill Center—or to children it could be anywhere they are allowed to explore on their own. City streets, abandoned lots and public parks provide endless opportunities for childrens’ imaginations.

At The Schuylkill Center we balance the structured and unstructured time we devote to programming. State academic standards, rigid curriculums and an environmentally-conscious culture allow us amazing opportunities to delve deep into environmental issues and natural history topics. Our guided lessons for visiting groups and outreach programs to schools are designed with learning objectives in mind.

The educational partnership we have with *Green Woods Charter School* is one example of the structured, content-oriented work of our educators. We also travel to dozens of classrooms with our watershed models, recycling bins and live animals. We bring environmental concepts to life from South Philadelphia to Swarthmore to New Jersey.

The less formal side of our education programming is just as important. Allowing children (and their parents!) the opportunity to explore in and connect with nature is critical to creating a future generation of citizens who are passionate about the natural world. Our after-school club—*The Monkey Tail Gang*—brings kids outside at a time when many of their classmates are at home on the computer or watching TV. Our *Nature Ramblers Summer Camp* offers a season full of opportunities to explore the forests, fields and ponds.

Earlier generations can remember playing outside by themselves or with friends for hours on end. Play was creative, honest—and outdoors. Today's generations are entertained by video games, televisions, and computers. The plugged-in part of our culture is here to stay, but we at The Schuylkill Center are not yet ready to let go of the *nature* side of play.

Children don't have to know the name of a tree to know that it is good for climbing, and we don't have to teach them the name of the habitat of the Eastern box turtle if they can tell us where to find it. There is an intrinsic value in children spending unstructured time in the outdoors. They become comfortable and aware. They problem-solve and create. They will also discover a love for the great outdoors- wherever that may be.

Join us on June 28 for *The Great American Backyard Campout: Get Geared up to Get Out!* Or on June 19th or June 21st to learn to fish. The important part is to get outside and rediscover the great outdoors.