



Christy Sargent, 12, of Northbrook, pets Khayam the cheetah as Tom Batina looks on yesterday at the Oak Brook Polo Club's fund-raiser for the Masai Mara game preserve in Africa.



Audre Mendel joined some 300 others for the \$150-a-plate charity luncheon.

# Big cat helps put on the bite

By Susan Saiter

Life in the fast lane may be the greatest, but Khayam the cheetah took the time yesterday to join celebrities and socialites in Oak Brook to raise funds for an East African game preserve being squeezed by urbanization.

The 8-year-old cheetah circulated during the cocktail hour at the Oak Brook Polo Club with other big names, including writer George Plimpton and James Fowler, host of the television show "Wild Kingdom."

Despite the claws and teeth, Khayam is a real pus-

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sycat when it comes to people, said her escort, Laurie Marker of the Wildlife Safari Game Reserve in Oregon. But after watching Khayam speed after a piece of meat pulled by a Mercedes-Benz 190, people wanting to pet her stepped very carefully around that 3-foot-long tail.

About 300 came to the \$150-a-plate luncheon, to benefit the World Wildlife

Fund's Friends of the Masai Mara Game Reserve in Kenya and the Shakespeare Globe Center Inc.

About 3,000 were expected for the international polo match afterward between the United States and Britain.

There were so many big names involved with the Friends, a society and celebrity watcher could get a stiff neck. To name a few, there were former Gov. Dan Walker and his wife, Roberta; Shakespearean actor Sam Wanamaker; Abercrombie & Kent travel company's Alistair Ballantine; Michael Butler, and Reutie Butler

Shober, whose animal photographs were auctioned off.

Master of Ceremonies Plimpton, fresh off a new book called "Fireworks," said his first trip to Africa was more than 20 years ago to hunt bongo, a mountain antelope. But, he said, in later trips he gave up hunting and became interested in wildlife preservation, like his close friends, Geoffrey J. W. Kent and his wife, Jorie Butler Kent, founders of the Friends of Masai Mara.

"Africa has become sort of a home away from home," Plimpton said, "and I watch it changing so rapidly, be-

coming so urbanized and populated."

The partygoers were obviously in favor of shooting beauties like Khayam with cameras, but no one seemed to blink at advertising brochures for expensive fur coats circulated among the chicly dressed crowd.

Despite the early rain and threat of a recurrence, the atmosphere was bright and cheery. Pots of geraniums were set to pick up the peppermint pink of the tablecloths, and there was much talk of another favorite animal of the crowd, horses.

Kent, looking very sport-

ing in tall boots, white riding breeches and a pink-and-blue striped shirt, vowed they would play despite the damp field. "We'll send them out to mow the grass a few times," he said, adding that it would not be necessary to bring in helicopters to dry off the field, as they did two years ago.

But with a good-natured dig against the English opponents, he predicted the field would favor the other team, as their weather made them more used to playing with such "soft footing."

However, he was wrong. The Yanks won 10-8.