



# My Pet s my rock

## THE MIKE WARD INTERVIEW

### John Thomson Actor

**I'M helping John Thomson weigh up his pet options. His daughters are pleading for a dog, but he's worried the cat won't be keen.**

I ask if he has suggested a stick insect.

"Not yet," he admits. "But hey, how about a pet rock? Remember those? They were those stones with googly eyes on them."

Hmm, that could work, I tell him. "It could, couldn't it? I'd have a few of them."

Now, in case you think we've completely lost the plot here, let me put this conversation into context. Cold Feet's John is one of the hosts tonight of a Channel 5 telethon, *Celebrity Help The Animals At Christmas*, raising funds for five major charities, and so the responsibility of pet ownership is actually something he's keen to highlight right now.

"A pet is a big commitment," he points out, "but people don't always look at the big picture."

"A lot of pets rescued by charities haven't necessarily been mistreated. It's just their owners can't cope."

Tonight's show (other hosts include Ant du Beke, Susan Calman, Gethin Jones, Michael Underwood and Gaby Roslin) is the last major job for John in what's been

another bonkers-busy year, much of it devoted to the filming of *Cold Feet* series eight.

Coming to ITV next month, it's the third helping of the Manchester-based drama since its resurrection in 2016. "Series six was fantastic," he says, with evident pride. "Seven was a bit like 'that difficult second album', a bit of a slow-burn. But this one is fantastic, very strong. I can't say much, but two really major things happen."

John's character Pete Gifford, whose depression storyline in series seven won both critical praise and awards ("That was very kind, I didn't anticipate any of that. I just wanted to do a decent job as an actor...") is arguably the most likeable of the five old pals around which the show revolves.

"I think that's because he's kind of hapless and fallible," John suggests. "People identify with fallibility."

Not that the actor and his character have much in common. For starters, John has been off the booze for years. "I look after myself now I don't drink any more, I don't smoke any more, I've got a personal trainer."

"I look all right, considering what I've given up, if you know what I mean."

"And it's paid dividends. I'm 50 next year but in my head I'm 25. Whereas I look at some people my age who I've known for a while and think,



**GOLD FEAT:** Actor John is fronting festive animal charity fundraiser. Left, with *Cold Feet* co-stars

## JOHN'S FAVOURITES



**TV SHOW:** *The Six Million Dollar Man*  
**FILM:** *The Dead Zone*  
**BAND:** Level 42  
**SINGER:** Nat King Cole  
**CHRISTMAS SONG:** All I Want For Christmas Is You, by Mariah Carey  
**BOOK:** *The Secret*, by Rhonda Byrne  
**MUSIC:** James Bond theme  
**ACTOR:** Anthony Hopkins  
**COMEDIAN:** Tommy Cooper

**FOOD:** Pan-Asian  
**DRINK:** Lime and soda  
**COLOUR:** Cobalt blue  
**CITY:** Manchester  
**HOLIDAY DESTINATION:** New England  
**GADGET:** Swiss army knife  
**APP:** Wikipedia  
**SCHOOL SUBJECT:** Drama  
**FIGURE FROM HISTORY:** Leonardo da Vinci  
**SPORTS STAR:** Geoff Capes  
**ANIMAL:** Chimpanzee

"What are you doing?" It's like looking at an old prun.

Nor does Salford-born John share Pete's fixation with Manchester United.

In fact, he hates football with a passion. "I can't stand it, can't bear it. I've never been to a game and I don't intend to."

And this loathing stems from what, dare I ask?

"At school I was a bit bullied, Mike," he tells me. "Sport is how you bond with other boys and I just wasn't any good. So they'd put me in goal – and what happens? You let the ball in and then they hate you. It just grew from there."

He's also unmoved by football's tribal aspect. "I get scared when I hear groups of men chanting, like at a train station."

"I go, 'Oh God!' Maybe in a past life I was at the Battle of Blackburn. That's what it feels like."

Not that he lacks a competitive streak. "I do love a quiz. Instead of watching sport I've used the time to read, study and learn. Knowledge is power and it's paid off. I've won *Tipping Point*. Point-

less, won 150 grand on *The Chase*, although that was as a team. And I came second on *Celebrity Mastermind* and *Fifteen To One*.

"Over the years I've raised absolute fortunes for charity on game shows, which is brilliant." And tonight, of course, he'll help boost the coffers of the RSPCA, Scottish SPCA, Donkey Sanctuary, Wildlife Aid Foundation and Blue Cross.

So I guess my final question should be animal-themed.

OK, here goes: John Thomson, if you could be reincarnated as an animal, which would it be?

Surprisingly, he doesn't hesitate. John must have thought about this before.

"A giant tortoise," he tells me. Really?

"Yeah, they can live to nearly 200 years old, Mike."

And he'd seriously want to do that?

"Well, it beats coming back as a fly."

● *Celebrity Help The Animals At Christmas* is tonight at 8pm on Channel 5. For campaign details go to [channel5.com/helptheanimals](http://channel5.com/helptheanimals)

