BRINGING HOME BABY – PARROTS AND BABIES CAN LIVE TOGETHER!
By Brenda Weegman, CVT

I have been a parrot caregiver for 12 years. Currently, I am “owned” by 2 African Grey parrots, 2 Budgies and a Cockatiel. When my husband and I decided to add a human baby to our flock, we had some concerns about how this would change the dynamics in our household. Thankfully, even though we had not always planned on having a baby, we had already taken steps that would make this change much less stressful.

Multiple birds- Having multiple parrots made the transition of bringing a baby into the home less of a big deal on the birds. They were already used to sharing our attention and had each other as entertainment when my husband and I were busy with the baby.

Flight- While this may not work in every household, I appreciate the fact that our parrots are flighted. Being flighted has given our birds a great sense of independence. They have not come to rely on me or my husband to move them from place to place (especially when I’m stuck in the recliner with a sleeping baby). It also gives the parrots a quick escape now that my toddler Hana is crawling and beginning to stand.

Playstands- We have playstands in every room of the house so the birds can be with us and watch what we’re doing without physically being dependent on us. This practice was started long before the baby came along. We set up food and water dishes on the playstands each evening. This has allowed me to clean the bird cages in the evening so I don’t have to do that chore in the morning while I’m busy getting baby ready and preparing to head to work. Playstands also give the parrots a place of their own when the rest of the room is bombarded with baby gear/toys. Another plus- these tall, multiple perching areas keep parrot beaks out of reach of baby’s hands!

Adaptability- Everyone in the house, including the birds, needed to be able to adapt to a new schedule. Normally, I did everything in the morning (changing papers, fresh food and water, fruits and veggies, etc.) Once the baby came, I had to spread out my chores throughout the day and prepare things in the evening for the following day. There...
were some days the birds didn’t get their fresh fruits and veggies, other days the cage papers didn’t get changed, but somehow we all survived. (OK, so there are still days like that).

**Baby sounds CD** - The first time I played the CD, the birds stopped to listen for a moment and that was it. The CD didn’t really faze them after that. Clark, our male African Grey, has come to interact right alongside the sounds of the real baby Hana squealing and he squeals right back at her. I also had other youngsters, in this instance my nephews and niece, come over to play quite a few times before Hana’s arrival. It took a bit longer for the birds to get used to these children; up until this point my birds didn’t have any direct experience with children.

**Props** - One prop I used to get the birds ready for our new arrival was an old doll I had as child. While I was pregnant, I would carry the doll around in my arms or in the baby sling as I went about doing my usual chores or while I played the baby sounds CD. While this was not my original intent, doing so gave me practice doing things one-handed. My main concern was potential biting behavior especially in regard to our female African Grey, Sophie. She was our first parrot and for a few months after we adopted Clark, I suffered a few good chomps from her. The time Sophie seemed most likely to bite was when I would offer my hand for her to step up while I was holding Clark in the other hand. Thankfully, I didn’t suffer the same consequences while holding the baby doll, but it did give both of us a chance to get comfortable with this new experience.

We also started setting up much of the baby’s gear well in advance. This allowed us to put up one thing at a time and give our parrots a chance to slowly adjust to the new transitions.

**Plan** - Having a plan was the best thing I ever did. Even though Hana came a month before we expected her, I had people “on-call” and ready to come in and take care of our birds until my husband was able to take them to Avian Suites for boarding while I went into the hospital. Of course, having a place to bring the birds was wonderful as well! Hana was born prematurely, which added almost two weeks to our hospital stay. Having the birds comfortably and safely boarded gave us humans a
chance to get settled back into our home before bringing the birds back into the forever changed environment.

We felt we had prepared quite well for the arrival of our baby. We now see that there were some things we had not anticipated and we had to reorganize a bit after Hana came home, but we find that is just the reality of being parents! Thankfully the birds gave us some insight into the need for flexibility, adaptability and patience which are necessary characteristics for living with parrots and people!