

131.5 Subalpine Scrub

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Scrublands of willows (*Salix* spp.) and other deciduous shrubs, so prevalent in the mesic alpine and subalpine areas to the north, are represented in the arid Southwest only in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico. Upland scrublands in this climatic zone are usually limited to narrow bands of shrubby and prostrate conifers, located at and just below timberline (=krummholz). These "elfinwood" ecotones are limited in area and composed of the same subalpine conifers that form the forests downslope—Engelmann Spruce (*Picea engelmannii*), Bristlecone Pine, (*Pinus aristata*), Limber Pine (*P. flexilis*), and Dwarf Juniper (*Juniperus communis*). Nonetheless, they exhibit a distinct scrub lifeform (Fig. 40). As is the case with Southwestern alpine, subalpine and montane communities, these facultative scrublands can be divided into Rocky Mountain and Sierran-Cascade biomes.

In accordance with the limited development and occurrence of these biomes in the Southwest, few vertebrates are limited to, or well represented in either *Rocky Mountain* or *Sierran-Cascade subalpine scrubland*. The southernmost populations of willow dependant boreal animals such as the Snowshoe Hare (*Lepus americanus*) and White-tailed Ptarmigan (*Lagopus leucurus*) barely reach this area in the alpine regions of the high Sangre de Cristo Mountains of southern Colorado and adjacent New Mexico. More indicative of the conifer scrublands in the subalpine Southwest are nesting populations of the White-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*).

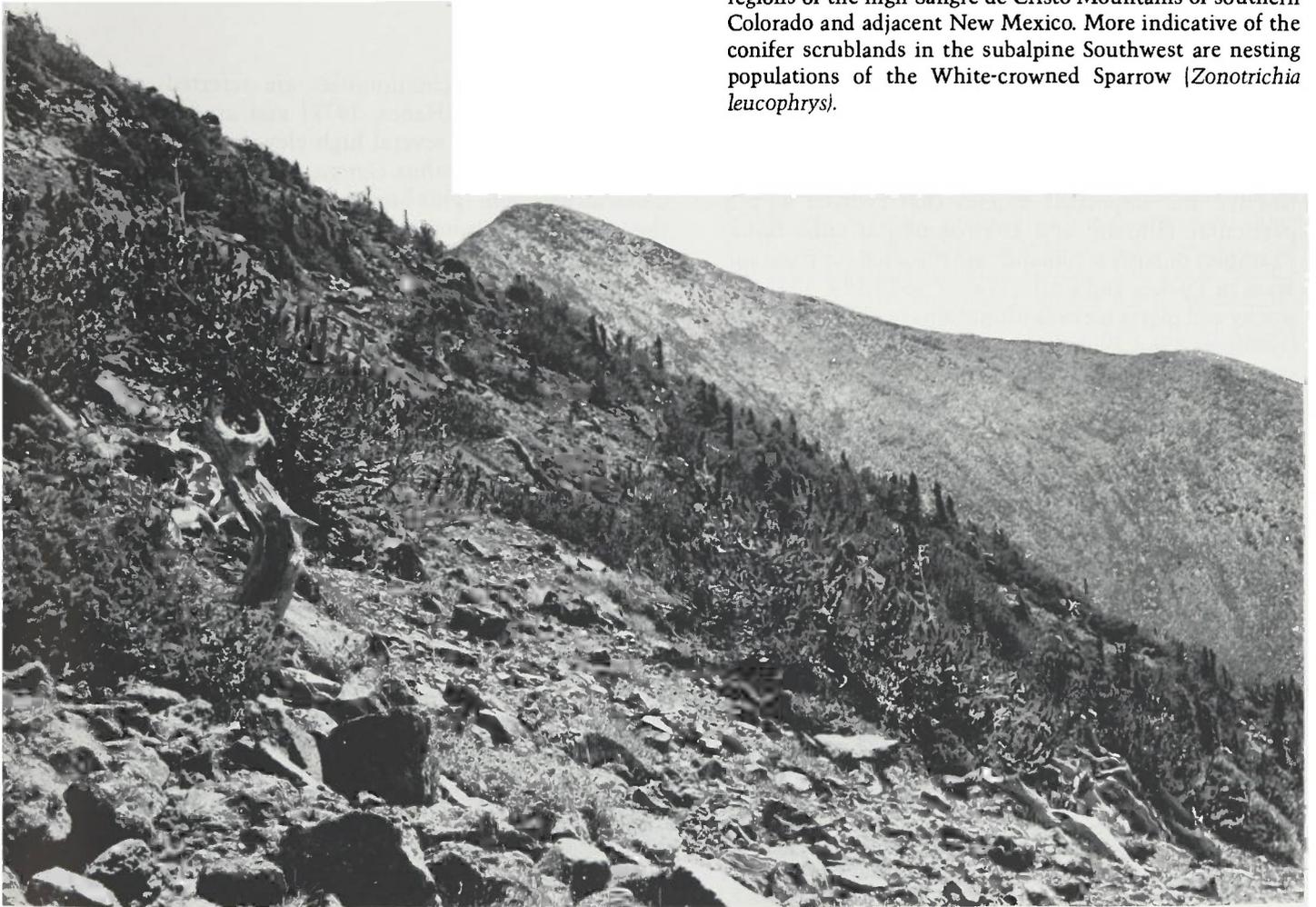


Figure 40. Subalpine scrubland of "krummholz" on San Francisco Peaks, Coconino National Forest, Arizona, ca. 3,535 m elevation. The Engelmann Spruce (*Picea engelmannii*) and Bristlecone Pine (*Pinus aristata*) are here dwarfed and in shrub form due to reduced available plant moisture from severe cold and wind shear.